UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

School Experiences of Antisocial Adolescents: Escaping a Destructive Lifestyle

by

Gregory Alexander Schoepp ©

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the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

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G Schoepp

9615-78 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T6C 0P2

Date: March 1, 1999

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "School Experiences of Antisocial Adolescents: Escaping a Destructive Lifestyle" submitted by Gregory Alexander Schoepp in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in School Psychology and Counselling Psychology.

Ronna Jevne

Dr. Ronna Jevne

Dr JJ Mitchell

Dr. John Mitchell

Dr. Henry Janzen

Dianne K Kieren

Dr. Dianne Kieren

Dr. Susan Danielsen

Dr. Paul Frick

Date: March 1, 1999

DEDICATION

In memory of Valerie Schoepp (1962-1996),
she exemplified courage, compassion, and an immense capacity to embrace life.

"Shake it up baby, twist and shout"

ABSTRACT

Schools are challenged to contend with a difficult group of adolescents who develop antisocial behavior during early adolescence in the absence of prior severe behavior problems. Research on antisocial youth typically focuses on the outside perspective of researchers and professionals, using samples from delinquent populations. This phenomenological study utilized the adolescent perspective, the inside view, to investigate the school experiences of adolescents exhibiting adolescent-onset conduct disorder. All participants demonstrated improving school performance following a history of mild to moderate conduct disorder behaviors at school and home. Qualitative data were collected from eight adolescents (four females and four males) between the ages of 15 and 18 who were registered in a high school program. The thematic analysis was contrasted with existing research perspectives on antisocial youth. A review of the literature revealed that adolescent-onset antisocial behavior is viewed as a temporary life phase resulting from personality predispositions and a process of mimicking antisocial peers to gain a sense of maturity. The analyzed themes matched the current conception of the transitory nature in the adolescent-onset trajectory. However, the thematic analysis revealed a deeper common experience of devastating consequences followed by renewed hope not evident in present models of adolescent antisocial behavior. The school experiences of these youth were embedded in a wider story of a tumultuous entry into an antisocial lifestyle, the destructive effects of worsening behavior, and a painful awakening to wasted time. The themes revealed the emergence of antisocial behavior accompanied by family-of-origin issues, peer persuasion, and personal liabilities. The worst phase of antisocial behavior included an I don't care identity, school lost as a priority, conflict and rejection at home, a sense of belonging with peers, and the influence of older peers. Striving for a better life arose from growing regret and disappointment over past experiences. Hope and anticipation, coping now, and advice for adults emerged from the gradual exit from antisocial ways. Gender differences were apparent in the severity of antisocial behavior, formation of peer networks, origin and expression of anger, and the level of family discord.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Societal Costs of Antisocial Behavior

Disturbing stories of interpersonal youth violence and associated injuries regularly appear in the media. Increasing weapons use and antisocial behavior by Canadian youth was evidenced by 900 youths aged 12-17 charged for violent incidents for every 100,000 in 1992 up from 415 in 1986 (Walker, 1994). Similar trends were evident in the United States with substantial increases between 1981 and 1990 in all categories of violent crime for youths under age 18 (Goldstein, Harootunian, & Conoley, 1994). The lethality of interpersonal violence among young people has increased and appears to be associated with greater access to lethal weapons or greater willingness to use more harmful means (Potter & Mercy, 1997). Youths who engage in antisocial and delinquent behaviors are at increased risk for several harmful adult outcomes: substance abuse and dependence, physical health problems, school dropout, job instability, and difficulties in close interpersonal relationships (Henggeler, Schoenwald, Borduin, Rowland, & Cunningham, 1998). The issues surrounding antisocial behavior and youth are compelling for educators, researchers, and other concerned professionals as adolescent violent behavior appears to becoming a more significant public health problem. The tremendous economic and emotional cost associated with adolescent antisocial behavior calls for multi-systemic solutions from social and economic institutions.

School Perspectives

Schools are increasingly burdened with the role of coping with growing numbers of antisocial students who erode the quality of education for all students. A small group of these students demonstrate aggressive, maladjusted behavior prior to entering school while a larger number develop temporary antisocial tendencies during adolescence. The absence of valid data collected over multiple time periods makes it difficult to determine the level of antisocial behavior in Canadian schools (Day, Golench, MacDougall, & Beals-Gonzaléz, 1995). However, in a survey of about 4000 Canadian high school students from 180 schools, one in three adolescents knew someone who was a victim of gang violence and one in two students knew someone who was beaten up at school (Bibby & Posterski, 1992).

MacDougall (1993) listed the following common themes from several Canadian Teachers' Associations: increases in verbal and physical assaults in schools, increasingly younger ages of students exhibiting violent behavior, and a higher incidence of verbal abuse.

Disruptive behavior is on the rise in Alberta schools and increasing numbers of students are experiencing physical violence, verbal threats and/or damage to property or theft (Alberta Education, 1993; ATA, 1996). Despite the rise in antisocial behavior, schools are increasingly challenged by shrinking government funding to provide appropriate interventions. For example, to qualify for severe behavioral funding in Alberta during the 1997/98 school year, a student had to exhibit aggressive and destructive behaviors corresponding to a diagnosis of severe conduct disorder, which drastically limits the number of students who qualify for this funding. Even so, the struggle is not in vain as evidenced by the decreasing dropout rate in Edmonton Public high schools (Skidnuk, 1998) attributed in part to counselling, program delivery flexibility, and home visits by teachers.

Existing Research Perspectives

The transition to junior high school may contribute to behavior problem onset because of a negative, regressive environmental change during early adolescence, at a time when students are seeking increased autonomy (Eccles et al., 1993). Because the school setting provides a consistent context for peer interaction, students have greater opportunities to interact with deviant peers. In addition, leadership, school policies including suspension and expulsion practices, teacher competency, and the physical building are all associated with school violence (Cole, 1995; Day et al., 1995; Hill & Hill, 1994).

Research studies on antisocial behavior have established robust findings in the area of incidence, prediction, and developmental pathways. Several general assumptions of chronic delinquency are supported by empirical evidence. It is identifiable at an early age, shows a persistent life-long course, co-exists with several other risk factors, and protective factors can mediate the effects of early risk factors (LeBlanc et al., 1991; Rutter, 1997; Yoshikawa, 1994). Antisocial behavior is more common in boys (Lahey & Loeber, 1994), and by age eight, the ratio of 4:1 is often cited in the diagnosis of conduct disorder (Kavanaugh & Hops, 1994). However, the rate is approximately equal during adolescence (Mandel, 1997).

The powerful effect of parenting on antisocial outcomes, especially for early-onset, has been clearly established (Dishion & Patterson, 1997; Frick, 1998; Yoshikawa, 1994). Parental psychopathology, marital conflict, or parent socialization practices interact with child factors such as temperament resulting in a coercive cycle of parent-child interactions. In adolescence, intensifying antisocial behavior pays off in parents stepping back to permit more unsupervised wandering. Families with adolescent-onset youth are believed to exhibit less severe levels of dysfunction than parents of early-onset children.

It is believed that the peer group plays a more significant role than family factors in the development of adolescent-onset antisocial behavior (Frick, 1998; Henggeler, 1989). Moffitt (1993) proposed a life-course-persistent and adolescent-limited taxonomy of antisocial behavior. In adolescence, life-course-persistent youth become magnets for novice delinquents, and through a process of social mimicry antisocial behavior is reinforced. Fortunately, many adolescent delinquents generally leave behind the antisocial lifestyle possibly due to maturation and previously developed prosocial and academic skills.

The higher prevalence of female conduct disorder during adolescence is documented (Cairns et al., 1988; McMahon & Wells, 1998). Socialization factors including familial influences and societal sanctions are attributed to the increased prevalence of female antisocial behavior (Giordana & Cernkovich, 1997). The development of severe antisocial behavior in females was addressed in the delayed-onset trajectory proposed by Silverthorn and Frick (in press). Females with conduct disorder share characteristics that are more common with boys showing early-onset conduct disorder than males in the adolescent-onset trajectory. It is possible early female maturation interacts with exposure to deviant males through dating and association with older males (Caspi, Lynam, Moffitt, & Silva, 1993).

Definition of Terms

There is considerable overlap between terms describing aggressive individuals such as violent, delinquent, conduct disordered, or antisocial. These terms are used interchangeably across studies, even though they are not consistently defined. The terms, antisocial behavior and conduct disorder, used within the context of this study are differentiated below.

Violent individuals are characterized by direct harmful actions towards others through assault, rape, and murder. Delinquency is a legal term and definitions may vary from province to province. Conduct disorder, a psychiatric construct, requires the presence of at least three antisocial acts in the past 12 months with at least one act in the past six months. It is characterized by a repetitive and persistent pattern of behavior in which either the basic rights of others or major age-appropriate societal norms or rules are violated such as destruction of property, vandalism, rape, assault, or breaking and entering (Frick at al., 1994; Wenar, 1994). Antisocial refers to behavior whose purpose is to inflict harm on others or their property across a range of settings. It suggests hostility to others, aggression, a willingness to commit rule infractions, defiance of adult authority, and violation of the social norms and mores of society (Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995). Antisocial behavior may or may not come to the attention of the juvenile justice system or mental health system and it covers a broad range of behaviors that deviate from accepted rules and standards.

Importance of the Study

A disturbing trend in Canadian schools is the growing concern for the emotional and physical safety of students and school personnel. An abundance of research has established prevalence and types of school violence (Day et al., 1995). Longitudinal studies have identified possible developmental pathways for antisocial behavior that begins with the family in the preschool years (Loeber, 1988; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992). Empirical research has explored the powerful forces of child and adolescent peer relationships (Coie, Terry, & Hyman, 1990; Dishion, 1990; Moffitt, Caspi, Dickson, Silva, & Stanton, 1996) and the influence of family dysfunction (Frick, 1998).

Current debate exists regarding the fundamental nature of these conduct problems, namely, whether they are best defined as social problems or psychiatric disorders (Jensen et al., 1993). The psychiatric model of conduct problems is one way to conceptualize these behaviors but it may overlook the social ecology of the settings the behavior occurs in. At present, a fruitful distinction between subtypes of conduct disorder distinguishes differing developmental pathways of antisocial behavior, but little is currently known about the adolescent-onset phenomenon. Current models of antisocial developmental pathways are based on delinquent populations not typical of the general school population. Theories are now emerging about female antisocial behavior but it is not known whether the process parallels or is distinct from the male experience.

Schools contend with a difficult group of adolescents who develop antisocial behavior in early adolescence, roughly corresponding to the junior high school transition. These students tend to develop chronic truancy, academic lag, and persistent conflict with school staff. However, it is not well understood how adolescents develop antisocial behavior for the first time in upper elementary or junior high school, and less is known about the inside perspective of adolescent antisocial teenagers. Empirical measures such as peer evaluations, third party behavior rating scales, self-report instruments, and socio-metric measures provide only a global indicator of behavior, but they ignore the personal meaning derived from an individual's experience. Studies that address this gap using qualitative methods can access the personal context of adolescent antisocial behavior thereby providing a means to understand the meaning of that behavior. An adolescent who temporarily adopts an antisocial lifestyle possesses a unique constellation of family and peer socialization, affect, cognition, and meaning that contributes to his/her decisions, and these complex interactions are not readily accessible through standardized, quantitative approaches. An in-depth description of the adolescent's school experience may provide new information, an inside view, that can compliment and enhance the objective, professional outside vantage. A glimpse of the inside view may facilitate positive change for youth with adolescent-onset antisocial behavior through the creation of a richer perspective.

The study is personally grounded in several ways. The past fifteen years as a teacher and more recently a psychologist, have molded my interest in children, adolescents, and families. Over the past six years, numerous men in therapy revealed how personal violent actions shattered dreams and families, and my present work in a hospital setting includes the challenge of helping parents with young children or teenagers with behavioral difficulties.

Statement of Purpose

The study of adolescent antisocial behavior has expanded our understanding and knowledge of a complex societal problem that is costly in both economic and human terms. Schools expend tremendous resources in dealing with antisocial youth. To this researcher's knowledge, no studies to date have explored the adolescent inside perspective to shed light on the experience of antisocial behavior in the school setting.

This study focussed on adolescents, age 15 to 18, who exhibited adolescent-onset conduct disorder in the school setting. The primary goal was to obtain a deeper understanding of the meaning of the antisocial behavior for the individuals who participated in the research, both male and female. The investigation attempted to describe and bring meaning to the complex interactional patterns of teenagers with adolescent-onset antisocial behavior and their social contexts of the school, peers, and family. The study was carried out from a phenomenological perspective through a qualitative analysis of the participants' school experience, based on data collected from semi-structured interviews. Knowledge of antisocial adolescents' perspectives on school contexts affecting their behavior may contribute to helping schools, service providers, and families become more effective partners in responding to the needs of antisocial youth through improved proactive intervention strategies in the schools.

Organization of the Study

The introductory chapter provided a research perspective in order to outline the importance of the study and to state the purpose of the research.

Chapter two provides a more comprehensive review of the literature and includes the theoretical framework and relevant research findings in the areas of adolescent antisocial behavior: etiology, developmental pathways, socialization processes of peers and family, and school influences. The research question and design follow the review.

Chapter three, the methodology section, begins with an overview of the philosophical foundations of phenomenological research and a rationale for the use of a qualitative research design. Validation of the study, a description of participant selection, data sources, and procedures for collecting and analyzing data follow. The chapter concludes with a discussion of ethical issues related to the research and the pilot study.

In chapter four, the introduction to participants, a detailed description of each participant is provided in the form of a brief biographical sketch for readers seeking further background information.

Chapter five provides a detailed explication of the themes emerging from the results analysis, and transcript excerpts from the interviews compliment the thematic analysis.

Chapter six links the study results with established research along with implications for intervention and future research. The study's limitations are presented, and the chapter concludes with the author's reflections on engaging in the research process.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The major purpose of a literature review is to link relevant research and theory to the study undertaken. This study was conceptualized within the broad theoretical framework of an ecological model of development. The literature was reviewed with a focus on that same framework. In this chapter, an explication of the framework is provided, followed by research findings related to adolescent antisocial behavior that includes the areas of adolescent-onset, peer influences, familial influences and the school setting.

Theoretical Framework

Despite the persistence of antisocial behavior over time and the tendency to justify the construct in trait or disorder terms, current theories view it as an interplay of risk-factors and mechanisms based within multiple systems of the individual, family, community and society (Dishion & Patterson, 1997; Farrington, 1997; Moffit, 1993; Rutter, 1997).

Ecological View of Development

Current theories draw from the ecological approach originally proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979). Interactions between individuals and their environments are described in a systems model to illustrate the ecological nature of human development processes. Individual development is embedded within a model of multiple and overlapping systems. Dynamic self-organizing systems are structured around underlying interactive processes of development both within and across contexts that create diverse outcomes across individuals, contexts and periods of development. Operating in either a positive or negative manner, the negative effects of these processes are described as "risks" or "vulnerabilities" while positive effects are called "protective" or "enhancing".

The ecological model contrasts to earlier behavioral genetics models of human development that identified unchangeable characteristics residing within the individual or environment. These models were criticized for their limited focus on the research question of "how much", in terms of determining environmental vs. genetic impact (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Because our understanding of environmental risk processes involved in antisocial behavior remains decidedly limited (Rutter, 1997), the research focus should center on how actual environments interact with genetic factors to shape human development. Carey and Goldman (1997) noted that recent genetic studies are moving away from the established "fact" of heretability and toward explaining the "how" of heretability. Studies that address the "how much" of genetics or environment provide little to explain diverse patterns of individual development, how to develop effective interventions, and they ignore the influence of the environment on the individual.

To further explicate the "how" question in their bioecological model of human development, Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) proposed measurable mechanisms called proximal processes that are "the primary engine of effective psychological development" (p. 572). These processes represent reciprocal two-way interactions between the individual and the environment. "The realization of human potentials requires intervening mechanisms that connect the inner with the outer in a two–way process that occurs not instantly, but over time" (p. 572). An example of a proximal process is the parent-adolescent interactions affecting susceptibility to antisocial influences (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

To understand adolescent antisocial behavior, it is important to characterize the organizing construct as a dynamic process rather than solely as markers or characteristics. Rather than viewing factors such as gender or IQ as directly influencing the impact of antisocial behavior, it is more useful to explore the connection between those factors and antisocial behavior through the mediating process of adolescent-peer or adolescent-teacher interactions that produce different outcomes. Viewed in this way, the construct opens possibilities to explain how the same variable produces different effects on males and females or how different outcomes are evident at different periods of development. The model then better represents the interactional nature of development rather than an "either or" approach of biological versus social factors. The conceptual framework for this study is thus established within an ecological systems approach.

Social Constructivism

The ecological approach to human development encompasses the philosophical paradigm of social constructivism that is based on the assumption that individuals construct their meaning within social contexts through the interpersonal medium of language

(Anderson, 1997; Mahoney, 1991). It is now a recognized theory of psychological development and is gaining recognition in psychotherapy known as the narrative approach (Tomm, 1989; White & Epston, 1990). The philosophical approach of phenomenology fits within the paradigm of social constructivism and serves as the basis for several qualitative research methods including this study.

Model of Antisocial Behavior

Patterson et al. (1992) developed a developmental model of antisocial behavior based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological approach. The model uses the ecological framework (social interactional patterns, child characteristics, and context) to explain the developmental patterns of childhood- and adolescent-onset antisocial behavior (Dishion & Patterson, 1997). Two basic "social interactional processes" contribute to the development of antisocial behavior: coercive family processes and deviancy training in the peer group. Characteristics of the child may exacerbate coercion and deviancy training and are indirectly related to antisocial behavior. Poverty, stress and divorce act as toxic environments for families increasing the potential for deterioration in family functioning. Contextual shifts affecting peer processes occur in transitions in peer groups created by the move from elementary to junior high to high school. A growing body of longitudinal research supports the developmental pathways model (Loeber & Farrington, 1997) and Moffitt's (1993) hypothesis of "adolescent-limited" antisocial behavior that is discussed later, fits this model. As such, the developmental model will serve as the conceptual framework for the study.

Etiology of Antisocial Behavior

The debate continues whether antisocial behavior arises mainly from biological predispositions or whether socialization processes are of primary importance. However, a refinement in biological methods is dissolving the artificial division of psychiatry into biological and psychosocial components. Understanding the role of genes is rapidly becoming necessary to delineate the specific role of environment in the development of psychiatric disorders. An interactional view is emerging that places psychobiology factors in a reciprocal, dynamic relationship with environmental factors. Biological perspectives are examined followed by a focus on socialization processes.

Genetic Contributors

Adoptive and twin studies provide compelling evidence that genetic factors influence antisocial behavior. A recent review (Carey & Goldman, 1997) indicated that identical twins are more similar than fraternal twins and that adoptees correlate with their biological relatives in antisocial behavior. Also evident was a stronger common environment for adolescents compared to adults that suggests causal factors may assist more in the initiation but not the persistence of antisocial behavior. However, all the data suggest that the environment accounts for approximately 40 to 50 percent of valid variance which shifts the research perspective into examining the interplay of nature and nurture in the development of individual differences. Although the existing data implicate DNA, results must be cautiously interpreted with respect to a common family environment. Caution must be used in extrapolating from the existing literature to other populations because of small sample sizes and specialized populations under study.

Carey and Goldman (1997) noted that important advances have been achieved in genetic epidemiology and molecular genetics resulting in the discovery of several alleles associated with aggressive behavior. A strong correlation exists between antisocial behavior and alcohol use problems. A deficiency in aldehyde dehydrogenase 2, an enzyme involved in metabolism of alcohol, may result in vulnerability to alcohol abuse. Some children with ADHD exhibit deficient thyroid hormone receptor function possibly increasing the risk of antisocial behavior. Decreased activity of Serotonin, the most widely distributed monoamine neurotransmitter in the human brain, is linked with impulsive or reactive aggressive behavior (Berman, Kavoussi, & Coccaro, 1997). Neuroimaging studies assessing adult brain function revealed a variety of brain structure differences including temporal lobe abnormalities (Henry & Moffitt, 1997). These results are limited by small sample sizes, lack of non-criminal control groups, and heterogeneous offender groups. It is also not possible to analyze the relation between neurological deficits and the onset and trajectory of the criminal career.

Genetic-epidemiological research on deviant behavior offers two possible conclusions. First, all behavior is influenced in some way by genes and the magnitude of influence is in the moderate range explaining about 40% of variance. Second, human behavior has an important environmental component. The studies reviewed are limited in that most of them were conducted on adult criminal populations and therefore, the results may not extend down the age scale to adolescents and children.

Adolescent Neuropsychological Contributions

Youngsters with conduct disorder, especially those exhibiting assaultive tendencies, have more limited verbal abilities and a higher rate of neurological signs that may be secondary to consequences of the behavior disorder (Hooper & Tramontana, 1997). Neurological abnormalities found in children with conduct disorder were EEG sleep abnormalities, seizure activity and frontal lobe paroxysmal activity, particularly in adolescents with a significant history of assaultive behavior. Children with conduct disorder have suffered more head injuries, show a higher incidence of disturbed consciousness, and are frequently small for their gestational age. Higher rates of learning disabilities and generalized problems with language suggest cognitive impairments that increase the risk of acting out, impulsive responses when placed in frustrating social situations. Longitudinal studies suggest that neuropsychological dysfunctions that manifest as poor scores on self-control tests or as the inattentive and impulsive symptoms of ADHD are linked with the early onset of conduct disorder with its subsequent persistence (Henry & Moffitt, 1997). These findings are limited by a lack of homogeneous samples, varying definitions of antisocial behavior across studies, inconsistent matching on variables influencing performance on neuropsychological tasks, and lack of informative control groups.

Interaction of Neuropsychology and Environment

Moffitt (1993) presented a well-documented developmental taxonomy for the link between neuropsychological deficits and persistent early-onset antisocial behavior. Neuropsychological deficits are defined as anatomical structures and physiological processes that influence psychological characteristics such as biological development, temperament, and cognitive abilities. Moffitt contends that genetic/biological and environmental factors both interact creating an evocative, reciprocal interaction where the child's behavior evokes a distinct parental response leading to antisocial outcomes. The continual process of reciprocal interactions between personal traits and environmental reactions across multiple domains diminishes the likelihood of change.

Socialization Processes and Adolescent Antisocial Behavior

A large body of research has shown that socialization processes exert a powerful influence on antisocial behavior. While the family is the prominent context for early socialization processes, peers become increasingly important during adolescence for shaping antisocial behavior.

Peer context and social processes are described in Moffitt's (1993) theory of adolescent-limited delinquency as a "group social phenomenon"; a product of an interaction between age and historical periods with the critical features of "biological age, increasingly important peer relationships, and the budding of teenagers' self-conscious values, attitudes, and aspirations" (1990, p. 686). The role of personality traits and cognitive deficits in this group is diminished while "social mimicry" of the antisocial style of life-persistent youths leads to antisocial behavior. Dishion and Patterson (1997) confirmed Moffitt's model of adolescent-limited delinquency by stating that for "adolescent-onset youths, the bulk of training in delinquency occurs under the aegris of the deviant peer group" (p. 213).

Moffitt's model was extended by Yoshikawa (1994) and Mandel (1997) who described the cumulative effects of "protective" factors such as child or adolescent attributes, family attributes and external supports. For adolescent-onset youth, external supports such as positive relationships with non-deviant peers or a significant relationship with a teacher became important.

Developmental Pathways of Adolescent Antisocial Behavior

Models of juvenile delinquency and current social interactional theories specific to age and gender suggest distinct developmental pathways that lead to antisocial behavior.

Delinquency Models

Quay (1987) proposed four subtypes of delinquent behavior: undersocialized aggressive; socialized aggressive; attention deficit; and anxiety-withdrawal-dysphoria. Table 2-1 summarizes the differences between undersocialized and socialized, as these two subtypes are the most relevant to the study.

Table 2-1 Characteristics of Undersocialized and Socialized Aggression

Undersocialized		Socialized	
Assaultive	Disobedient	Bad Companions	Group stealing
Destructive	Untrustworthy	Stays out late at night	Truant
Boisterous		Loyal to delinquent friends	

Note. From "Patterns of Delinquent Behavior," by H. C. Quay, 1987, *Handbook of Juvenile Delinquency* (pp.123). Copyright 1987 by John Wiley & Sons.

Our knowledge of undersocialized youth is greatly indebted to studies of the legally delinquent. This group demonstrates excessive aggression, most likely experiences continuous difficulties, has problems inhibiting behavior, and often adopts a lifelong criminal career. The socialized aggressive group comprises approximately one-third of those institutionalized and through their lifetime have channeled behavior into delinquent activities while leaving their interpersonal relationships, cognitive abilities, and social skills intact.

Based on reviews of longitudinal research (Kazdin, 1995; Loeber,1988; Tolan & Loeber, 1993), it is postulated that specific developmental paths lead to specialized and generalized types of delinquency. Table 2-2 outlines the characteristics of the three paths that correspond to the above subtypes identified by Quay.

The developmental paths related to antisocial behavior are the aggressive and nonaggressive ones with the former associated with earlier onset and greater risk for chronic delinquency and lifelong criminal careers. The latter path indicates a lower rate of aggression with less seriously impaired social skills leading to more positive relations with peers although these children do not always discriminate between deviant and non deviant peers. The police do not always detect the crime committed by this group and academic performance is typically better than the aggressive/versatile group. A higher proportion of females is associated with later onset of conduct problems than males. The third group, Substance Use, do not appear to show severe aggressive or nonaggressive conduct problems.

Table 2-2

Characteristics of Aggressive/Overt Path; Nonaggressive/Covert Path & Exclusive Substance Use Path

Aggressive/Overt	Nonaggressive/Covert
Onset of conduct problems in preschool years	Onset in late childhood or early to mid adolescence
Aggressive, concealing conduct problems	Mostly non-aggressive conduct
Hyperactive/impulsive/attention problems	No appreciable attention/hyperactivity problems
Educational problems	
Poor social skills and interpersonal relationships	Capable of social skills
	Association with deviant peers
High innovation rate	Low innovation rate
Low remission	High remission rate, at least for delinquency
More boys than girls	Higher proportion of girls than aggressive path

Exclusive Substance Use
Onset in middle to late adolescence
No appreciable antecedent conduct problems
Possible antecedent internalizing behaviors

Note. From Natural histories of conduct problems, delinquency, and associated substance use," by R. Loeber, 1988, in *Advances in clinical child psychology* (Vol. 11, pp. 101). Copyright 1988 by Plenum Press.

Delinquency models utilize a probabilistic sequence applicable to many antisocial boys. While these models provide a useful framework for understanding the progression of antisocial behavior, they provide only tentative information about later onset of antisocial behavior and may not be applicable to females.

Age-specific pathways

An extensive body of research has established a clear developmental pathway for antisocial behavior with evidence for an earlier and later onset producing different patterns of behavior (Loeber, 1988; Moffitt, 1993; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992). In regards to the childhood-onset pathway, Frick (1998) proposed two subtypes of children with conduct disorder based on the presence or absence of callous-unemotional traits. His model creates a clearer link to adult conceptualizations of psychopathy. The "callous-unemotional conduct disorder" group exhibits low behavioral inhibition that places a child at risk for developing a callous interpersonal style, which in turn increases risk for violation of social norms and others' rights. The "impulsive conduct disorder" group, related to diverse interacting causal factors, shows poor impulse control in part due to poor parental socialization, low intelligence, and defects in social cognition. Frick's (1998) model suggests several distinct pathways underlying the problems in impulse control in children.

The research on antisocial children consistently reports that some youths enter the developmental sequence for the first time in early to middle adolescence without previously exhibiting conduct problems. This type of antisocial behavior is referred to as "adolescent-onset" (Dishion & Paterson, 1997; Lahey & Loeber, 1994), "late-starters" (Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992), or "adolescent-limited" (Moffitt, 1993). In comparison to the early-onset children, less research has been conducted with the adolescent-onset group. It is suggested that this group demonstrates less severe antisocial behavior and shows a better prognosis for ceasing delinquency. Stealing, vandalism, truancy, and substance abuse are by-products of association with a deviant peer group and not the consequence of a coercive interpersonal style (Dishion & Paterson, 1997, Moffitt, 1993). The later start means these adolescents are more socialized than early starters and have developed skills for relating to peers and meeting academic requirements.

Snyder and Huntley (1990) hypothesize that the combination of stressful adolescent developmental tasks, overly controlling parenting, and parental stressors diminishes the co-participatory approach needed to accommodate the adolescent's need for independence. Consequently, adolescents may drift toward peers and activities that appear "cool", "daring", or "macho". Walker (1995) contends that these adolescents have not been excessively exposed to negative family conditions.

Evidence pertaining to the question of adolescent-onset antisocial behavior was provided by the longitudinal research of Moffitt (1993) who proposed that juvenile delinquency embraces two distinct categories of individuals. A small group demonstrates "life-course-persistent" antisocial behavior which is characteristic of the undersocialized or aggressive/versatile groups identified above and the second category, "adolescent-limited", which is similar to the socialized or nonaggressive antisocial subtypes outlined above. Discussion of Moffitt's work is limited to the adolescent-limited category since it is the focus of the proposed study. Table 2-3 lists the features of adolescent-limited antisocial behavior from a longitudinal study of 457 males covering a life span of age 3 to 18. Moffitt et al. (1996) suggested that adolescent-limited boys may be promising candidates for intervention because they lack a cumulative life history of maladjustment that hinders change in life-persistent antisocial behavior (Moffitt, Caspi, Dickson, Silva , & Stanton, 1996)

Table 2-3

Characteristics of Male Adolescent-Limited Antisocial Behavior Compared to Life-Persistent Pathway

No stable or pervasive pattern of childhood conduct problems
Antisocial behavior indistinguishable from life-persistent group by mid-adolscence
Less aggressive
Higher levels of education
Closer family attachments at age 18
Personality profiles not pathological
Desirable leadership qualities
Desire interpersonal closeness
Eschew traditional status hierarchies
Better situated to establish bonds to a partner and commitment to a career path

Note. Adapted from "Childhood-Onset Versus Adolescent-Onset Antisocial Conduct Problems in Males," by T. Moffitt et al., 1996, in *Development and Psychopathology, 8,* p. 399-424.

The idea of a "late starting group" originates from Moffitt's finding that 12% of the youngsters in his longitudinal study were classified as new delinquents by age 13 with an absence of antisocial behavior prior to age 11. Three fourths of this same group was expected to cease all offending by the mid-twenties based on data from age 18. Moffitt proposed that adolescence generates an age dependent motivational state influenced by life-course-persistent antisocial models so that their delinquent behaviors can be imitated. Attempts to mimic antisocial styles continue if they reinforced for their delinquency.

It appears that adolescent-onset antisocial behavior may be related to Moffitt's description of adolescent-limited delinquency. As infants and preschoolers, these individuals experience positive parental influences but in adolescence they may lack parental supervision and are influenced more by antisocial models than by their family. A limitation of the model stems from the use of a male population; whether the model is applicable to females has not yet been confirmed. The next section outlines gender issues related to the development of antisocial behavior.

Gender-specific pathways

Aggressive behavior such as bullying, ridiculing, and victimizing is almost as prevalent for girls as it is for boys (Cairns et al., 1988). However, antisocial behavior and conduct disorder has been studied more intensively among males than females because of the frequency with which males engage in these behaviors and consequently encounter the police and juvenile court system. The prevalence of childhood-onset conduct disorder is about three to four times higher for males versus females but the rate is approximately equal for adolescent-onset (Mandel, 1997).

An important factor to explain gender differences in aggressive behavior is social context. Males and females are socialized differently with girls being supervised more closely. Adults seem more tolerant of male delinquency, "boys will be boys", encouraging males to be tough risk takers (Farrington, 1987). Girls are more likely to use relational forms of aggression such as verbal insults, gossip, ostracism, threatening to withdraw friendship, or third-party retaliation (Mash, 1998). During adolescence, the function of aggressive behavior centers on group acceptance, whereas for boys aggression remains confrontational.

Kavanaugh and Hops (1994) reviewed the research on gender specific pathways to antisocial behavior and depression. The absence of positive behaviors in females across adolescence is more significant than for males. Gender differences in influencing others was cited: boys use direct confrontation and aggression and are reinforced for it while girls are reinforced for using compliments and imitation to influence others. Females may be socialized and reinforced by stereotypes of independence and emotionality and they learn to use depressive behaviors to influence others. Two kinds of aversive behaviors are suggested; aggression used by males and depressive or distressed responses used by females. The authors question whether gender-specific cultural expectations and test instruments bias the diagnosis of conduct disorder. Patterson's coercive model fits with Kavangh and Hop's view that aggressive and distressed behaviors are maintained by coercing compliance in others.

Giordana and Cernkovich (1997) proposed females have been socialized to be more sensitive to others and to place a higher value on interpersonal intimacy. Females are more strongly bonded to the family than males making familial influences more salient in the creation of antisocial behavior. Female delinquents were found more dysfunctional than male counterparts suggesting that because societal sanctions against female misbehavior are so strong, severe familial problems must exist in order to generate female delinquent conduct among girls.

A solid body of research evidence shows that inconsistent, punishment-oriented discipline is associated with an increase in antisocial behavior. Because lower rates of female antisocial behavior has historically been connected to greater levels of parental supervision and discipline, poor familial supervision is characteristic of serious female offenders. Giordana and Cernkovich (1997) noted that the chances of having a criminal record were almost two times higher for abused/neglected subjects when compared to non-abused subjects. They hypothesize that child abuse and neglect are more likely to create antisocial behavior in females because girls are more likely than boys to be abuse victims.

A "delayed-onset trajectory" (Frick, 1998; Silverthorn & Frick, in press) was proposed to explain the development of severe patterns of antisocial behavior in girls. Possessing similar correlates as boys with childhood-onset conduct disorder, it is not until adolescence that girls start showing conduct disorders although they may show environmental and temperamental vulnerabilities from childhood. Female adolescents with conduct disorders tended to come from more dysfunctional families, had higher rates of neuropsychological and cognitive dysfunction, and had poor adult outcomes; all of which are similar to the childhood-onset boys. Females with conduct disorder demonstrated fewer shared characteristics with boys in the adolescent-onset trajectory resulting in more females than males fitting in the callous-unemotional category. Because of the stronger societal prohibitions against female antisocial behavior, stronger predispositions to antisocial conduct may be needed by girls to overcome prohibitions. Decreased parental supervision and increased peer acceptance help overcome cultural prohibitions against displaying antisocial behavior.

The co-ed school setting highlights gender differences in antisocial behavior. Caspi et al. (1993) found that early maturing females were much more involved in antisocial behavior by age 13. The authors hypothesized that early female biological development interacts with exposure to male delinquent culture as a consequence of dating and association with older males.

In drawing conclusions from the research on age and gender differences in antisocial behavior outcome, it appears there is an interaction between biological predispositions, socialization processes, and cultural expectations. The social interactional model (Patterson et al., 1992) of antisocial behavior would appear to be appropriate for both male and female adolescents. The delayed-onset trajectory (Silverthorn & Frick, in press) proposed a distinct pattern for the development of female antisocial behavior but it did not differentiate an adolescent-onset typology. A lack of female samples in current research calls for exploratory research to determine how female adolescent-onset antisocial behavior differs from parallel male behavior.

Socialization Processes

Familial Influences

Patterson's ecological model of development (Dishion & Patterson, 1997; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992) upholds the simultaneous influence of the context of the child's life, the function of the child's behavior within relationships, and the child's characteristics that interact to determine the onset and severity of antisocial behavior.

In early childhood, children learn to use aversive tactics or "coercion" such as whining or arguing to terminate parental intrusions. In these families, parents tend not to promote prosocial skills. The parents' noncontingent interactions with the child foster an environment where aversive tactics are more effective for the young child to organize their familial world. The family members' reaction during conflict episodes determines the relative rates of prosocial and coercive reactions. The highest risk parents tend to be irritable and non-supportive of prosocial interactions during conflict, which in turn produces a young child who tends to be coercive and socially unskilled. Patterson et al. (1992) found social disadvantage and parental antisocial behavior influenced discipline and positive reinforcement while transitions, stress, and social disadvantage seemed to have an indirect effect on parenting skills. These findings corresponded with the conclusions of Offord et al.

(1992) who reported that low income status predicted one or more psychiatric disorders among children free of disorder four years earlier.

Frick (1994; 1998) stated that the interrelationship of parental psychopatholgy, marital conflict/divorce, and parental socialization practices on children's behavior problems highlighted several family factors affecting antisocial behavior. There was a familial link to antisocial behavior across generations but methodological limitations included father reports from a spouse or other relatives and reliance on clinic control groups. Interparental conflict associated with divorce was most related to child behavior problems rather than disruptions caused by separation of a parent and disruption of the parenting process that interfered with a parent's ability to positively interact with the child. Conduct problems were associated with lack of parental involvement in the child's activities and the quality of parental supervision. Harsh or abusive parental discipline practices and parental inconsistency in providing discipline related to aggressive and delinquent behaviors. The type of family dysfunction rather than the degree of familial dysfunction determined the severity of family dysfunction with families of children having Conduct Disorder exhibiting more severe dysfunction. However, the correlation between parenting practice and conduct problems was only significant for children without callous-unemotional traits.

Frick (Christian, Frick, Hill, Tyler, & Frazer, 1997) confirmed the intergenerational link to antisocial behavior by showing that a high rate of Antisocial Personality Disorder in biological parents was evident in both an “impulsive conduct disorder” and a “callous-unemotional conduct disorder.” The children with impulsive conduct disorder recognized consequences of their behavior and they showed social problem solving skills. The callous-unemotional subtype demonstrated a more severe pattern of antisocial behavior consistent with adult psychopathy constructs.

Patterson (Dishion & Patterson, 1997) hypothesized that the conflict arising from adolescents striving for autonomy leads to increasing payoffs for antisocial behaviors such as arguing truancy, clothing, hairstyle, and curfew time. As these behaviors escalate, it becomes increasingly difficult to supervise youths who are physically the same size as their parents. Given modern parental uncertainty about their responsibilities for supervision and child rights, parents may find a sense of relief when they finally step aside and permit unsupervised wandering.

Patterson's adolescent-onset theory corresponds to Carter and McGoldrick's (1989) description of the "family life cycle" as a process of expansion, contraction, and realignment of the relationship system to support the entry, exit, and development of family members in a functional way. Adolescents' demands for more autonomy and independence may precipitate a shift in family relationships across generations. There must be a family unit transformation from protection and nurturance to the preparation of the adolescent's entrance to the adult world of responsibilities and commitments. This change may parallel transitions in parents as they enter mid-life and with major transformations faced by grandparents in old age. After a degree of confusion and disruption, some families are unable to change the rules and limits resulting in family dysfunction and the development of unwanted symptoms in the adolescent.

Research on the impact of family functioning on development of antisocial behavior has clearly identified factors that increase the likelihood of antisocial behavior emerging at an early age. Emerging research is beginning to address familial factors affecting later-onset of antisocial behavior. It is theorized that parental adjustment or dysfunction, social disadvantage, and adolescents' drive for autonomy create disruptions in the parenting process that contribute to the development of later-onset antisocial behavior.

Peer Influence

Peer influence on antisocial behavior has not been closely studied and we have little knowledge of how peers influence antisocial behavior (Tolan & Loeber, 1993), but, it is known that association with deviant peers is a powerful predictor of delinquent behavior (Henggeler, 1989). The influence of family structure, socialization, and demographics are also strong influences (Straus, 1995). It is not known whether antisocial peers recruit naïve or at-risk peers who then graduate to delinquency, whether mutually at-risk peers flock together, or whether a combination of their deficits and strengths produces antisocial behavior (Tolan & Loeber, 1993).

Family and peers both exert influence on degree of conformity (Steinberg, 1989), however, conformity to peers is higher in early and mid adolescence than pre or late adolescence. Normal adolescents, especially early adolescents in same sex cliques, are more likely to conform to their peers' opinions about short-term, day-to-day, social matters while looking more to parents concerning long term questions of education, occupation, values, and religious beliefs.

The attraction of some adolescents to deviant peer groups may be connected to status (Manaster, 1989). Adolescents who see antisocial peers as respected figures may be drawn to them and their ways, whereas those who view antisocial individuals as a disrespected and alienated minority may be drawn to them as an alternative to a straight, hypocritical middle class lifestyle. The association with the group is for membership and belonging, for status and association, rather than as a means of participating in antisocial behavior. The adolescent who feels a part of the group is socialized into its ways and the antisocial behavior gets its meanings from the group.

Moffitt's (1993) taxonomy of life-course-persistent and adolescent-limited antisocial behavior provides a detailed examination of conformity to antisocial standards. Adolescent-onset delinquency is explained through three concepts: motivation, mimicry, and reinforcement. An age-dependent motivational state was created by societal changes in health and work that lengthened the duration of adolescence. From Earlson's (1968) "psychological moratorium", Moffitt suggests the modernization of western society created a 5 to 10 year vacuum trapping youth in a maturity gap, a warp between biological and social age. Coinciding with the initial discomfort of this gap, adolescents enter a social reference group who already have 3 to 4 years of experience with this vacuum, some of whom have already learned delinquent ways of coping with it. Thus, onset of puberty coupled with exposure to peer models is an important ingredient of adolescent-limited antisocial delinquent behavior.

Within this model, life-course-persistent youth become influential models with valuable skills and these antisocial individuals who were rejected and ignored now become a "magnet" for novice delinquents during early adolescence. Near adolescence, a few boys join the life-course-persistent ones, then a few more until social mimicry generates a delinquent peer group. In terms of epidemiology, delinquent participation during adolescence shifts to a normative group social behavior from childhood individual psychopathology before reverting back to psychopathology in adulthood. It is hypothesized that antisocial behavior is reinforced by a damaged relationship with parents, finding ways to look older, and elevated risk-taking. Finally, adolescent-limited delinquents generally do not adapt a life long criminal behavior because it is hypothesized they develop a repertoire of prosocial and academic skills and they usually have intact cognitive and personality functioning.

Moffitt's term "symbiosis of mutual exploitation" attempts to explain the relationship between life-course-persistent and adolescent-limited antisocial youth as a process of modeling, social influence, and social mimicry without a friendship involving exchange of affection. This mutually advantageous interaction corresponds to Mitchell's (1992) concept of "reciprocal rationalization" that leads adolescents to obtain the companionship of peers who perceive their limitations or failures in a favorable light. Dishion, Spracklen, Andrews, & Patterson, 1996) found a reciprocal language pattern among 13 and 14-year old male adolescents. Delinquent dyads were more likely to react to rule breaking topics and less likely to reinforce prosocial discussions, therefore, positive reinforcement of deviant discussions appeared to be a powerful influence on future deviant behavior. Highly aggressive fourth and seventh grade students were usually solid members of peer clusters and established relationships no less meaningful than those of nonaggressive peers (Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, Gest, & Gariepy, 1988). In delinquent gangs, there is stability in group influence despite changes in group composition (Cairns, Cadwaller, Estell, & Neckerman, 1997). Adolescents reconstituted the same the same type of group with which they have been previously affiliated creating a "consistency in influence, despite changing faces" (p.200).

Peer rejection and aggression are predictors of antisocial behavior (Coie, Lochman, Terry, & Hyman, 1992; Kupersmidt, Coie, & Dodge, 1990). Aggression violates peer norms for tolerable behavior. Rejection may contribute to increased antisocial behavior by causing individuals to strike out from anger and isolation or by leading to increased truancy and dropping out of school. Patterson, Reid, and Dishion (1992) hypothesized that a child's aggression (first learned in the family context) and lack of social skills leads to rejection by peers. A combination of continued interpersonal aggression, inept parenting, and isolation from peers leads to affiliation with like-minded, unskilled, and antisocial peers who provide a context for the further antisocial attitudes and skills.

A study of 35 Edmonton delinquent street youth (Kennedy & Baron, 1993) indicated that a convergence of victims and offenders fostered a loss of respect, the instrumental need to gain items, and the influence of third parties. An escalation of violence was created as a desired reaction that gained social and material rewards. Within these interactions, group members promoted images or constructed reputations. In some cases, conflict appeared to provide an integrative function for the group. These results cannot be overly generalized, however, the experience of street youth parallels Moffitt's concept of the interaction between life-course-persistent and adolescent-limited antisocial adolescents.

The research on peer influence in antisocial behavior is primarily concerned with delinquent male populations. Moffitt's (1993) theory of life-course-persistent and adolescent-limited antisocial behavior has important implications for the school environment and deserves further exploration.

School Influences

Several aspects of the school context including leadership, parental and community involvement, policies, and security and maintenance of facilities cultivate antisocial behavior (Hill & Hill, 1994; Walker, 1995).

A review of school-based violence policies and prevention programs in Canadian school boards raised six conclusions about school factors that affect antisocial behavior (Day et al., 1995). Although most school boards use suspension and expulsion of students, this practice further marginalizes students already at an elevated risk for school failure and antisocial behavior. Alternative on or off-site programs operated by the school board in collaboration with community agencies may provide suitable resources for conduct problem youth. In regards to policy making, all stakeholders including students, parents, and school personnel need to be involved and need to be aware of the content of decisions. Adequate levels of site security are required to reduce the influence of highly antisocial youth with vulnerable peers. Staff development ensures a higher level of collegiality, stronger shared philosophy, and commitment to a more positive school climate. There is a noticeable lack of effective program evaluation to guide further program development. Lastly, school board policies should possess a community focus given the multi-faceted causes of antisocial behavior. Partnerships between schools and community groups must be developed if comprehensive violence prevention efforts are to be effectively implemented.

Cole's (1995) description of negative and positive school characteristics corresponded to Day's findings (See table 2-4).

Table 2-4 Characteristics of Unsafe and Safe Schools

Risk Indicators	Effective-Functional Indicators
Ineffective responses to community diversity	Programs promote equity and diversity
Unclear behavioral and academic expectations	High expectations for learning
Bullying and intimidating are common	School grounds are safe and secure
School discipline is inconsistent	Clear consistent expectations and discipline
No emergency response plans	Coordinated programs with community services
Limited staff inservice	Staff inservice and team work are the norm
Little parental involvement	Parents are partners in decisions making

Note. Adapted from "Responding to School Violence," by E. Cole, 1995, in the *Canadian Journal of School Psychology*, *11*, p. 114.

Current research conducted in Canadian schools tends to confirm the above conclusions. MacDonald and daCosta's (1996) survey of 231 grade seven to nine students and 28 school administrators in Alberta revealed that school violence was perceived as more of a problem for students than administrators. In addition, a larger number of observers of violence than victims or perpetrators were limited in confidence and willingness to deal with violence for fear of retaliation. Craig and Peplar's (1997) observations of bullying showed that it was an interpersonal activity with the peer group playing a major role in providing reinforcements. Both of these studies relate to the interactional model of peer influence. The peer group appears to serve an important role in antisocial behavior and in preventing students from reporting violent incidents to school staff.

Teachers are a critical component of the school setting and they work in a school culture rooted in nineteenth century traditions of maintaining social control. Under pressure to maintain order over students by force and discipline, it is a challenge for teachers to create humane learning environments (Noguera, 1995). Despite these limitations as well as the victimization of many teachers and students, many exceptional teachers are able to establish rapport with their students by negotiating differences of race, class, or family experience. Noguera, from student interviews, described three effective teacher characteristics: "firmness, compassion, and an interesting, engaging, and challenging teaching style" (p. 205). The individual teacher plays a vital role in fostering a safe school environment.

Physical attributes of the school building, school policies and expectations, parental and community involvement, and teacher characteristics also influence antisocial outcomes. The school is an important context in the development of antisocial behavior because it provides a meeting place for peers. Further research is needed to better understand adolescents' experience of the school setting if we are to gain a more informed perspective of the relation between schooling and adolescent antisocial behavior.

Research Question

Current research indicates that childhood-onset or life-course-persistent antisocial behavior places youngsters at a higher risk for criminal careers, for becoming chronic offenders and for multiple drug use. It is hypothesized that these at-risk adolescents become magnets for other kids and they provide negative models of antisocial behavior for youth who develop a temporary involvement in adolescent-limited or adolescent-onset antisocial behavior. The power of peer influence, the influence of the school setting, and the impact of family dynamics for these late starters is not well understood. Because a large proportion of peer interaction occurs within the school setting, a qualitative study will provide personal accounts of male and female adolescent-limited antisocial behavior. Adolescent-onset of antisocial behavior is much more amenable to treatment and the insights of the adolescent participants may provide practical considerations for effective intervention strategies. The primary research question thus generated is:

- *What is the school experience of adolescents exhibiting adolescent-onset conduct disorder?*

A qualitative research design is appropriate for this question because the primary topic of investigation is the adolescent experience. The methodology of a study outlines the procedures used in answering the research question posed. Following the establishment of a philosophical base and rationale, the methods section describes the selection of participants, data collection, and analysis.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

As shown in chapter two, current models of adolescent antisocial behavior were derived from natural science or quantitative research models that focus on identification of specific relationships in an attempt to explain and predict outcomes. The primary interest of this study was to explore the antisocial adolescent experience of the school setting. Because phenomenology is concerned with describing the world as experienced by subjects, this research was designed as a phenomenological study in which the qualitative interview was the means of gaining privileged access to the participants' basic experience of the lived world (Kvale, 1996). The study was an effort to move beyond existing concepts of antisocial behavior to penetrate the ignored, taken-for-granted aspects of participants' experience.

Understanding is achieved from description, not exploratory science (Osborne, 1990). The human science approach is based on the premise that understanding is obtained by direct interaction with individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of interest, allowing insight into personal perspectives (van Manen, 1990). As noted in the literature review, there was little data based on adolescent experiences of antisocial behavior. Current research relied on self-report measures, third party ratings, and standardized questionnaires in which external standards dictate a referent of a broad developmental perspective. It seemed important to consider in-depth descriptions of adolescent experiences as an equally valid and rich source of knowing, that may compliment and enhance the professional judgment of outside observers. A qualitative approach seeks to extract the essence and meaning of those experiences, and is well suited to the subject area of adolescent antisocial behavior, which is strongly influenced by social contexts.

The development of adolescent antisocial behavior fits within the social constructivist paradigm within which qualitative research methods are situated. A focus on illuminating meaning of the individual experience corresponds with the ecological systems approach set out as the theoretical framework for this study. The underlying interaction processes take precedence over identifying traits in the individual or in the environment.

It is hoped the readers' understanding of adolescent antisocial behavior will be deepened. For successful intervention, understanding human experience is the basis for appropriate action and herein lies the significance of this study, in the realm of understanding. The phenomenon of antisocial behavior is multi-faceted and multi-dimensional, so psychological constructs such as conduct disorder impose external frameworks impoverished of human meaning. The qualitative method allows for emergence of the participant's experience, illuminated from the inside point of view. For those intervening with antisocial adolescents, the text may offer a view of the destructive behavior and angry attitude from a more holistic perspective to more readily affirm and use teenagers' expressions of personal meaning.

Conducting the study was guided by three objectives: (1) collecting descriptions of antisocial adolescents experiences of the school setting; (2) analyzing and exploring these descriptions using phenomenological and hermeneutic methods to obtain an understanding of adolescent antisocial behavior; and (3) using these understandings to reflect upon the existing perspectives of adolescent antisocial behavior.

Phenomenological Research Methods

Phenomenology studies an individual's perspective on their world, attempts to describe in detail the content of the person's consciousness, and catches the diversity of the individual's experiences to explicate the essential meaning (Kvale, 1996). It is oriented to the question, "What is this particular experience like?" (van Manen, 1990). The approach focuses on the lived, everyday world as experienced pre-reflectively rather than as people conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on it.

The phenomenological approach is based on existential-phenomenological thought that implies we have no existence apart from the world and the world has no existence apart from us (Colaizzi, 1978). In order to understand what it means to be human, the notion of coconstitutionality is considered; the individual and world constitute an interdependent unity (Valle & King, 1989). Therefore, human behavior cannot be understood in isolation from the environment.

The goal of phenomenological research is understanding through the use of description rather than exploratory science (Osborne, 1990). Understanding is obtained by direct interaction with those individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of interest, allowing insight into their perspectives. Phenomenology attempts to explicate the meanings as we live them in our everyday existence (van Manen, 1990). The focus, therefore, is not only on observable behavior, but also on the inner experiences of thoughts, emotions, and sensations. The researcher simultaneously focuses on the internal world of each participant while also considering the interaction with the environment that leads to the phenomenon. An insider's perspective is illuminated allowing the researcher to be open to the rich nature and range of possibilities in each life story.

The study attempted to capture the essence of adolescent antisocial behavior to show the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner. The essential structure of the experience is composed of basic and invariant constituents called themes. A theme is a phrase or statement that captures a meaning in the flow of experience (van Manen, 1990). Lived experience is condensed in an effort to point to the significance of a particular phenomenon.

Human science asserts that knowledge and truth are created in the human lifeworld. The vehicle for gaining access to the lived experience in this study was the qualitative research interview that became a construction site of knowledge (Kvale, 1996). Language constitutes reality and conversation allows access to the knowledge embodied in people's stories. The interview takes place in an interpersonal context where it exists in relationship between the person and the world.

The study was also aligned with van Manen's (1990) conceptualization of hermeneutic phenomenology, in which he emphasizes the descriptive element (phenomenology) and the interpretive aspects (hermeneutics). According to van Manen (1990), examining lived experience becomes a reflective process of analyzing the structural or thematic aspects of the experience. The research process included the hermeneutic circle or respiralling, the recursive process of moving back and forth from parts to whole until coherence and unity was achieved. The surface data was transformed, through revisiting and revising, to a richer text. The reciprocal connection between researcher and participant during the interview process led to a construction of meaning and interpretation. The hermeneutic process was also used when the researcher moved continually between the data and interpretations to ensure accuracy of the interpretation. Awareness of presuppositions led to taking them into account during the interpretation.

In describing the nature of phenomenology, van Manen (1990) asserted the nature of an experience was uncovered if "the description reawakens or shows us the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner (p. 10). The goal of this study was to reveal the meaning of adolescent antisocial experiences to gain a more thoughtful understanding in our helping roles with adolescents.

Validation of the Study

In qualitative research, validity pertains to the degree that a method investigates what it is intended to investigate, to the extent which the observations indeed reflect the phenomenon (Kvale, 1996). The crucial issue is whether the researcher's descriptions are an accurate representation of the participant's experience (Wertz, 1984). The main principles of validation in qualitative research are goodness of fit and corroboration of data. The issues of validity and reliability are addressed through bracketing, descriptive validity, interpretive validity, and theoretical validity (Kvale, 1986, Maxwell, 1992).

Bracketing

Bracketing is undertaken through rigorous self-reflection to make explicit the researcher's understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions, and theories in an attempt to bring greater objectivity to the investigation. Setting bias and predispositions aside makes way for the understanding of other perspectives, and ultimately, to generate a new perspective from the data (van Manen, 1990). A completely presuppositionless description is not possible, but bracketing and a careful description of data analysis procedures provides the reader with an opportunity to understand how data interpretations were made (Osborne, 1990).

Self-awareness aided in staying aware of personal prejudices that influenced data collection and analysis, and it allowed the essential structure of the phenomenon to emerge. In this way, there was reduced risk in projecting bias onto interpretation that allowed acceptance of participants' points of view, generating a new perspective. Bracketing aided personal reflection to acknowledge how the research process was impacting the researcher's view of himself and others. Conducting a pilot study provided necessary background in a human science approach, and it helped clarify preunderstandings of antisocial behavior found in both personal conceptions and in the published literature. A research journal was maintained throughout the research project to record thoughts, impressions, and beliefs that merited further reflection.

My collective experiences as a teacher and psychologist provided experience working with children and adolescents demonstrating behavior problems. Biological factors such as temperament are unquestionably important influences in the developmental process, but individuals are embedded within a web of social interactions that define personal perceptions. In counselling families, I noticed the identified adolescent problem was typically the focus of parents' discussion, while the teenager's story was undervalued or ignored. Teenagers adopting an antisocial lifestyle are often more vulnerable to mounting negative peer pressure. Identity starved youth are thrown together in the school environment where the incidence of antisocial behavior is a reflection of broader cultural tolerance of violence. Working within a hospital setting the past eleven months revealed the restricting effects of psychiatric diagnostic labels that seem to blur peoples' vision of a better future. When domineering stories distort personal views and limit visibility for healthy alternatives, people are recruited into harmful attitudes and behavior.

Descriptive Validity

Descriptive validity refers to the factual accuracy of the accounts obtained from each participant and interpretive and theoretical validity are dependent upon the researcher's report of the data (Maxwell, 1992). Threats to descriptive validity are the omission or commission of aspects of the phenomenon that are significant to the account from the participant's point of view. To address this issue of observation quality, triangulation, the procedure of obtaining confirming data from a number of perspectives or within the participants' account of events, is often used. In this study, triangulation was accomplished by a process of ongoing comparisons of data obtained from audiotaped interviews, transcripts, participants' parents, and school counsellors.

Quality observations were also achieved by ensuring the researcher was properly trained in interview skills and maintained an open and mindful attitude. Training and experience as a psychologist provided the interview skills of active listening, paraphrasing, and bracketing of perspectives. The pilot study allowed evaluation of questioning techniques to ensure the researcher maintained an open, curious, and non-judgmental stance. Throughout the interviews, I sought to sustain a focus on the adolescent perspective and continually reviewed questions to evaluate for consistency.

Interpretive Validity

Interpretive validity is concerned with whether the account is accurate from the perspective of the individual being described (Maxwell, 1992). Meaning must be based on the conceptual framework of the participants involved, relying on the participants' own words and understandings. The important question here is whether the interpretation is well documented and coherent so that the reader can obtain a consensus with the researcher.

Interpretive validity focuses on explication of the researcher's perspective in three ways. First, bracketing is the process in which the researcher clearly describes, prior to and throughout the data collection and analysis, presuppositions that may bias the data interpretation. The research journal allowed a continuous bracketing process to record reflections and reactions throughout data collection and analysis. Reviewing questions and comments in the transcript helped ensure the adolescent perspective was being reflected. The second method involved the hermeneutic process of respiralling between the data and the interpretations. This was achieved by the audit trail that is a clear and detailed description of the data collection and analysis procedures. It allows the reader to reconstruct the research process, enabling the reader to understand how the data interpretation was reached. In this study, the audit trail is represented in the raw data, data analysis notes, field notes, and related bracketing process materials. The audit trail is highlighted in the sections on participant selection, interview process, and analysis and interpretation. The third step of interpretive validity is communication where goodness of fit was accomplished through the dialogue between researcher and participant. The researcher's interpretations were taken back to each participant to confirm accuracy and to allow for correction or clarifications as needed.

Theoretical Validity

Theoretical validity goes beyond concrete description and interpretations to address the researcher's theoretical understanding of the account as an explanation of the phenomenon (Maxwell, 1992). Theoretical validity is accomplished through the persuasiveness of the arguments set out by the researcher and by the degree of resonance with other readers and researchers. The theoretical framework of an ecological approach was presented and validated by research evidence along with the importance of studying adolescent-onset antisocial behavior within the schools.

External Validity (Generalizability)

Transferability is used in qualitative research methods to define issues of generalizability (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Empathic generalization relates to the goodness of fit between the reader and researchers' interpretations. It is paramount that sufficient evidence was provided by the researcher for generalizarions to be made (Kvale, 1996). As part of an in-depth exploration of a phenomenon, qualitative methods utilize a small sample and no attempt is made to generalize to a larger population. Instead, generalization lies with the reader to make meaningful connections with findings that describe commonalties of experience.

Reliability

Reliability is achieved by different observers or methods producing descriptively similar accounts of the same events (Maxwell, 1992). Dependability, consistency, replicability, and stability are terms used to describe reliability in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Kvale, 1996; Osborne, 1990). Reliability lies in the fit between data recording and what actually occurs in setting under study, not in consistency across observations. In this study, an interview guideline and similar procedures were used for all participants in data collection and analysis.

Different accounts from varying perspectives are not a threat to reliability since both can be descriptively valid given the theoretical perspective. An intersubjective agreement, a consensus of meaning, should emerge with continued dialogue. Reliability was addressed in this study though the between-person analysis where common themes emerged from the variations in participants' experiences.

Participant Selection

The core data for the study was obtained from eight adolescent participants, 4 males and 4 females, who had a past or current history of conduct disorder, adolescent-onset type. The participants, aged 15 to 18, were currently registered in a high school program. Participants had to possess the knowledge and experience of the phenomenon and be able and willing to reflect upon and articulate their experience (Polkinghorne, 1983). A combination of maximum variation and intensity sampling (Patton, 1990) was used to encompass a variety of school settings and to include participants who were experiential experts about the phenomenon.

Consent was initially obtained from the Edmonton Public, Edmonton Catholic, Strathcona County, St. Albert Protestant, and County of Parkland School Boards to contact individual schools. Later, consent was also obtained from Alberta Family and Social Services and Alberta Justice before interviewing a participant in a community based treatment program. A brief research proposal was mailed to each school followed by a phone call. After receiving permission from the school principal to proceed, a meeting was scheduled with a school counsellor to review the research proposal, elicit cooperation, and review the behavior criteria contained in the proposal. The counsellor was instructed what to say to potential candidates and an information sheet for participants was given for distribution to interested students (See Appendix A-School Counsellor Prompt; Appendix B-Invitation to Participants). Because the school would not release names directly to the researcher due to confidentiality issues, the counsellor identified potential participants and then released a name and phone number to the researcher. The parent(s) and participant were contacted by phone and if interested, a meeting was scheduled with the family to provide more information, to determine if the adolescent was appropriate for the study, and to obtain written consent. After the first meeting, any subsequent contact was with the participants only. Of 21 schools contacted, 3 declined participation and 9 were unsuccessful in finding participants.

Initially, participants were to be currently exhibiting serious behavior problems at school. The pilot study revealed that students whose current behavior was improving expressed more interest in the study. Consequently, the criterion was altered to include students whose past history met the criteria selection but who were currently exhibiting improved behavior. The DSM-IV (1994) criteria for conduct disorder, adolescent-onset type was used to establish a consistent screening method. After the school identified potential participants, confirmation of conduct disorder behaviors was accomplished through interviews with school staff, participants, and parents. No standardized behavior rating scales were used. The selection criteria sent to schools were as follows:

a. Male or female participants aged 15-19.
b. Student was or is currently registered full-time in the 1997-98 high school program.
c. Participants are currently exhibiting adolescent-onset antisocial behaviors at school or have a previous history of antisocial behavior. The history of behavior problems must not precede age 10. Antisocial behaviors include at least three of the following:
    (1) bullying, intimidating, or threatening others
    (2) initiating physical fights
    (3) using a weapon that can cause serious physical harm
    (4) physical cruelty to animals
    (5) physical cruelty to people
    (6) stealing while confronting a victim
    (7) forcing someone into sexual activity
    (8) deliberate fire setting with the intent of causing serious damage
    (9) deliberate destruction of others' property
    (10) breaking and entering
    (11) often lying to obtain goods or favours or to avoid obligations
    (12) stealing without confronting victims
    (13) often staying out late at night despite parental prohibitions beginning before age 13
    (14) running away from home overnight at least twice while living in parental home
    (15) often truant from school beginning before age 13.
d. Participants did not exhibit antisocial behaviors prior to the age of 10.
e. Current or past association with a deviant peer group at school and/or community.
f. The participants must be willing to discuss their perceptions, be able to articulate their experiences clearly, and be competent in speaking and understanding English.

The above selection process was successful in identifying interested youth. According to DSM-IV criteria, the participants' antisocial behavior corresponded to a mild to moderate severity of conduct disorder symptoms (See Chapter Four for detailed participant background). From the available information, the teenagers' behavior patterns would not have rated as severe because a majority of their undesirable actions were related to destruction of property, lying or theft, and serious rule violations. Frequent malicious aggression such as cruelty to people or animals was not present, which corresponded to the less severe behavior patterns of adolescents demonstrating later-onset antisocial behavior (Moffitt, 1993).

The eight participants ranged in age from age 15 to 18 at the time of the interviews. One participant was 15 years old, two were age 16, three were 17, and two were age 18. Seven participants resided in a family home in the following family compositions: three lived with biological parents, one lived with a single divorced parent, two resided with their remarried biological mother, and one lived with her biological father and the common-law spouse. The remaining participant lived with an aunt, and he did not know his father and his mother was deceased. The cooperating high schools were part of the public education system except for one community treatment program that involved both therapy and schooling. The schools represented predominantly urban areas with the exception of one school that also served the surrounding rural area.

The initial meetings with participants and their parents that took place in the family home during the evenings afforded a valuable glimpse of home life. The second meeting location was left to participants' discretion, the majority choosing the school setting in a private office provided by the counselling department. In each case, a quiet, uninterrupted space was provided to ensure privacy. After the first meeting, subsequent contact was with participants only. The third meeting location for theme validation was selected by participants. Two youths chose a restaurant, two selected the family home, one opted for school, and two individuals were reached via phone since they had moved. Unfortunately, one participant could not be contacted and written correspondence was not acknowledged.

Interview Process

In the initial meeting that included parents, everyone in attendance was oriented to the nature and purpose of the research. Background information was collected to determine if the selected behavior criteria were met (See Appendix C-Background Information). Issues regarding the voluntary nature of the study, confidentiality, informed consent, and withdrawal of participation were clearly outlined through presentation of the written consent form (see Appendices D & E-Participant and Parental Consent). Parents were informed they would not have access to the interview data without prior consent of their son or daughter. All interviews were audiotaped for subsequent transcription and analysis. The same individual was hired for transcription of all the tapes and participants were made aware of this arrangement. I edited each transcript in conjunction with reviewing the tape.

A research journal was kept to record observations and impressions immediately following each interview and for later contact. The journal also served as an ongoing reflection space for ideas and insights during the lengthy reading, analyzing, and writing process. Personal emotions and reactions as well as possible biases and judgements affecting the interviews or interpretation were recorded in the research journal. Together with the transcripts and data analysis notes, the research journal served as an audit trail to record the evolving nature of the research project.

The second interview, about an hour in length, was completed with each participant and all the adolescents felt the conversation time was adequate to share his or her story. An opening statement, which was shared with participants in the first meeting, was reread to initiate the second interview (see Appendix F-Interview Prompt). A semi-structured interview format then flowed from an interview guide (see Appendix G-Interview Guide) that allowed participants to describe their experience with minimal direction from the researcher. Interviewing adolescent participants presented unique interviewing challenges. Participants' responses were shorter than the typical adult response so the interviewer had to be cognizant of not leading the interview with an increased number of questions used to invite conversation. Siedman's (1991) description of interview skills was beneficial for constructive questioning. Open-ended questions were used, questions followed from what was said, language was taken seriously by asking for clarification, further elaboration was requested when needed, and participants were invited to tell a story about what they were discussing. A curious, not knowing approach ensured the interview stayed focused on obtaining descriptions of what participants felt, experienced, and how they acted.

Each interview was conducted to obtain specific, concrete, and detailed descriptions of the adolescent's experience at school in the midst of their behavior problems (Polkinghorne, 1983). The interviews invited descriptions of what the experiences were actually like as they were lived, rather than attempts to obtain abstract generalizations about the meaning and causes of antisocial behavior (Calaizzi, 1978; van Manen, 1990). Because self was an important part of the research approach, careful preparation took place in this project including the interviews. The investigator's stance was described as deliberate naivete (Kavale, 1996) to gather descriptions of the interviewee's experience that were presuppositionless as possible. Participants were joined in the interview, establishing an atmosphere of safety and trust that invited a rich, open recounting of experience (Becker, 1986; Wertz, 1984).

Following completion of the interview analysis and written synthesis of experience for each participant, a third interview was scheduled with seven of the eight participants. One participant could not be contacted. Participants were given a synopsis of their own story and were invited to check the accuracy of the researcher's understanding. In some instances, the third meeting provided an opportunity for further reflection and insight for the participant.

Similarities between human science interviewing and existential forms of psychotherapy were noted by Kvale (1983) and Colaizzi (1978). The overlapping roles of researcher versus therapist were experienced during this research, especially in contact with parents during the initial interview. Understandably, some parents hoped that participation for their child would reap therapeutic benefits. Therefore, great care was taken with parents to clarify my researcher role. As well, I twice took a therapeutic stance at the conclusion of the second meeting to encourage one participant to visit the school counsellor for support, and a referral was facilitated for another participant around grief issues.

Analysis and Interpretation

The processes of data collecting, data analysis, and textual interpretation evolved through one another in a dialectical mode (Kvale, 1996; van Manen, 1990). These processes involved moving back and forth between transcript and interpretation and between participant and myself to ensure emerging themes remained true to the participant's experience. Similar to assembling a complex jigsaw puzzle, each smaller piece influenced the overall picture. As the overall picture emerged more distinctly, the significance of each portion was clarified. Each theme of the lived experience was interpreted in terms of the holistic structure of the overall experience. In turn, the essential structure emerged from the distinct themes.

The first step of data analysis began with analysis of individual data (Colaizzi, 1987, Osborne, 1994). Analysis of each participant was completed before moving on to the next to preserve the wholeness of each experience. The female transcripts were analyzed first followed by the male participants to facilitate exploration of potential gender differences in experiences. Steps comprising the research process can be outlined, as below:

(1) After the interviews were transcribed, the transcript was read in conjunction with the audiotape at least twice to verify transcription accuracy.

(2) A within-person analysis was conducted first. Further reading of the entire transcript created an overall impression of the participant's experience. The rereading approach allowed for an initial open, holistic approach (van Manen, 1990, Wertz, 1984) and a general map or web of participant experience was generated for each transcript.

(3) Significant and meaningful text sections were underlined, transformed into paraphrases, and then labeled to generate an underlying theme. This process was facilitated by printing transcripts in column form on the left side of the page, leaving the right half for analytic comments and themes. At this level, the language remained more descriptive than interpretive, in an effort to use participants' language.

(4) A reliability check of the labels was now conducted with two transcripts. Two independent individuals were each supplied with an explanation of the researcher perspective, the labels and categories from one transcript, and were asked to apply them to randomly selected pages from the transcript. A high degree of agreement existed and in the case of a question, we were able to reach agreement.

(5) For each participant, a sequential list of labels was then printed on colored paper and matched with the corresponding transcript excerpt. With a different color for each participant, the cut up transcripts were placed in envelopes of each theme, with the

corresponding labels affixed to the outside for convenience of tracking data (See Appendix H-Illustration of Transcript Analysis).

(6) The within-person analysis was completed by clustering identified themes and writing a synthesis or overall summary of each protocol.

(7) A between-person analysis was then conducted in order to allow emergence and identification of themes that were common to all protocols. Each individual analysis was reviewed with the intent of eliminating irrelevant descriptions and unnecessary descriptions. The themes and envelopes for each participant were then combined into common themes using a tabular format on large envelopes to identify shared clusters and unique clusters. If the cluster of themes was common to all eight participants, it became a theme; if it occurred in three to seven participants, it was named a subtheme; and if it was one or two participants, this was retained and reported as unique. This dialectical process enabled retention of both commonalties and unique aspects of the data. The grid system also aided in looking at the interrelations between themes to move to a further abstraction of larger, more encompassing themes.

The written synthesis was validated by discussion with the participant in the third meeting that focused on determining the accuracy and interpretation of the data. Clarifications and inaccuracies were discussed and incorporated into the analysis before the between-person analysis was started. Each participant was given the opportunity to present additional relevant information that was missed in the second interview.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are of primary importance in phenomenological research because of the potential intense interaction between researcher and participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). Before the study was undertaken, a detailed proposal was submitted to the Department of Educational Psychology Ethics Review Committee in accordance with the University of Alberta to obtain approval for the proposed research procedures. The proposal was then approved by the Edmonton Public, Edmonton Catholic, Strathcona County, St. Albert Protestant, and County of Parkland School Boards as well as by Alberta Family and Social Services and Alberta Justice. The schools protected student confidentiality through the school counsellor initially approaching potential participants prior to the researcher receiving the name and phone number.

The preliminary interview with participants and their parents established participants' eligibility, interest, and willingness to participate. Participants and parents were informed of the study's purpose including what participation entailed, a reiteration that participation was voluntary and withdrawal at any time was possible, and assurances for strict confidentiality in any written material from the study. Willing participants and their parent(s) or guardian(s) signed a consent form indicating they understood the nature and purpose of the study, that all relevant questions regarding research were answered by the researcher, and they were willing to participate. Anonymity was protected with the use of first names only in written material and the use of pseudonyms. All interviews were tape recorded, and the tapes were kept in a secure location, until such time when they will be destroyed.

Confidentiality for the adolescent participants was respected by informing parents that they would not have automatic access to the written analysis. Written permission from the adolescent had be obtained in order to allow parents to read the analysis, as well, sharing of the analysis with parents will take place in the company of the researcher and participant to ensure questions and concerns can be addressed. No parent requests were made to access interview data. Parents were also informed that the participant might reveal more intimate information to the researcher than the parents. If a situation arose when information needed to be shared with parents, the researcher would work with the adolescent to have him or her communicate the pertinent information to the parents (Koocher & Keith-Spiegel, 1990). This situation did not arise. The parents were present in the first part of the initial interview to cover the above ethical concerns.

It was possible that disturbing issues might surface for the participant during the interview process and the researcher remained sensitive to the possibility that the participant might experience discomfort or difficulty in recounting their experiences. When the above situations arose, participants and their parents were directed to appropriate counselling services if needed.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted with one participant prior to commencement of formal data collection. An interview and a preliminary analysis were completed to help refine the interview procedure and data collection. More importantly, it helped in refining the participant criteria selection procedures. The pilot study also ensured that the data analysis procedures provided a good fit for the data and emerging themes. The data was not included in the study.

CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCTION TO THE PARTICIPANTS

The following participant biographies were composed after the individual analysis of each transcript to provide a sense of time, space, place and structure to the story as it unfolded. Biographies were presented to the participants during the third meeting to invite feedback about accuracy and fit. Where necessary, some personal details were slightly altered to protect privacy. The stories were provided for readers who desire an overview of the participants' context and experience.

Crystal

Crystal was an articulate, friendly and reflective 18 year-old who was taking a combination of grade 11 and 12 courses at an urban public high school. Her adoptive family, a 15 year-old brother and two parents, resided in a rural area in proximity to a small city. Adopted as an infant, Crystal had recently learned her birth name and she was discussing the possibility of searching for her birth mother. Probation started in 1995 for probation breaches and time in a remand centre. She moved away from her family in 1997 and was residing with family friends in a different city. Her parents supported this move and Crystal was beginning to experience more success at school after a turbulent three years of home and school truancy, juvenile delinquency, and alcohol and drug abuse. At the time of the interview, Crystal was taking anti-depressant and thyroid medication. Reported conduct disorder behaviors were bullying, intimidating, or threatening others, initiating physical fights, breaking and entering, often lying to obtain goods or favours or to avoid obligations, stealing without confronting victims, often staying out late at night despite parental prohibitions beginning before age 13, running away from home overnight at least twice while living in the parental home, and often truant from school beginning before age 13.

Crystal traced the beginnings of her problem behaviors to grade six when she started to smoke cigarettes. She described herself as overweight in elementary school and had a "fear of getting fat" that later evolved into an eating disorder in grade 8. The grade 7 transition from a rural to urban school connected her with a different crowd and she became a "bully' who victimized younger students and teachers. By grade nine, Crystal's relationship with her parents had deteriorated while she began to experiment with alcohol and drugs. A combination of rigid parental expectations, association with deviant peers, and alcohol and drugs resulted in "losing control" in grade 10 and 11. Once teased about her appearance, in high school she found herself attractive to older males who provided a negative influence. Vulnerable to peer influence, she was pulled away from stable friends and was attracted to delinquent youth. She reported two alleged incidents of rape at age 15 and felt males were manipulative. Increasing conflict at home resulted in more running away and she eventually lived with two older female criminals who coerced young women into crime with drugs and alcohol. The peer group became Crystal's family where she found attention and a place to fit in. A pattern of intoxication, school truancy, and suspensions led to incarceration at a Young Offender Centre, an adolescent group home, and an alternative school program. In the midst of her problems, Crystal felt unfairly treated by teachers and principals, and she refused to listen to any helping adult. Her bad reputation in the school system made it increasingly difficult for her to re-enter school after repeated suspensions.

The interview represented a point in Crystal's life where she was beginning to gain back control. Hitting "rock bottom" in jail represented a turning point and a realization she didn't belong in prison. She began to accept help and started pulling her life back together. Although Crystal expressed shame and regret about "wasted time", she also recognized positive aspects of her experiences that would make her a more understanding adult. A renewed commitment to school was expressed and the influence of "popularity" in high school was now viewed as temporary fun with no long-term gains. More aware of her parent's limitations, she talked of her new role of maintaining family peace to obtain what she wanted. She recognized that adult opinions are not all "stupid". She encouraged parents and school staff to focus on teenagers' positive qualities to motivate them to change undesirable behaviors.

Crystal was just beginning to find a new direction in life. Her story seemed to be one of "Who am I? Where did I come from? Where do I belong?" She seemed to be trying to make better sense of herself and past experiences to help her stay focused on a new direction that included a commitment to finishing school.

During the third meeting about 11 months later, Crystal stated that she had remained faithful to her commitment to completing school. In the past year, she had two unsuccessful attempts of living in her parents' home but found the familial conflict continued. She had been living with friends, working part-time, and taking correspondence high school courses with plans of attending a local college in an arts program. She described a two-month relapse of drinking and frequenting bars. Her probation ended about two months ago and she had remained out of the court system.

Andrea

Andrea, age 15 and an only child, was enrolled in grade 10 at an urban public high school taking a combination of grade 10 and 11 courses. She was residing in Edmonton at her parents' home. Her mother, an unemployed professional, remarried in 1991 and her stepfather was frequently away from home for business travel. Andrea was given a diagnosis of Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder about a year and a half earlier and had tried a trial of stimulant medication. At the time of the interview, she was not taking medication. The first two interviews took place in her parents' home. When I met with Andrea, she had just recently started experiencing some academic success in school after a turbulent three and half-year period of alcohol, drugs, delinquency, truancy, probation and jail. Conduct disorder behaviors included breaking and entering, often lying to obtain goods or favours or to avoid obligations, stealing without confronting victims, running away from home overnight at least twice while living in the parental home, and often truant from school beginning before age 13.

Both Andrea and her mother traced the origins of Andrea's behavior problems at school to grade seven when she connected with "defiant" peers and was lured by the excitement of alcohol and drugs. She seemed to adopt the "I don't care attitude" of her friends and began to experiment with alcohol and marijuana which led to school truancy. Friends took priority over school and Andrea gradually developed an attitude of hating school and defying authority as a way to be respected by peers. Impatient to have fun with friends, she ignored her school work and fell further and further behind only to become increasingly frustrated at school. When teachers, principals or counsellors tried to offer help, she rebuked them. A cycle of frustration and anger at school led to school suspensions and a strong dislike of her teachers and principals. Grade seven was failed and grade nine was described as her worst year because mounting frustration from neglecting her academics led to her giving up on school. In addition, school and learning became less important as she became more caught up in the thrill of crime, drugs, and alcohol. In grades 8 and 10, Andrea's parents had her twice placed in an adolescent residential treatment program for a five and one month period.

Throughout the turbulence at school, Andrea consistently connected with a delinquent peer group. Defiant and impulsive, she was attracted by the excitement of a delinquent lifestyle and she and her friends seemed oblivious to the possible consequences of their "I don't care" attitudes. As the delinquent behavior progressed, Andrea found herself involved in delinquent behaviors such as break and enters, assaulting others, selling weapons, and riding in stolen cars. The actions of Andrea and her friends seemed fueled by impulsive decisions that ignored any potential consequences. She ended up on probation and spent time in a Young Offender Centre.

The escalation in Andrea's problem behavior led to increased conflict with her parents as she rebelled against their discipline attempts with increased antisocial behavior. Once close to her mother, she felt replaced by her stepfather after her mother's remarriage. Her parents' attempts to control her behavior only resulted in further isolation from the family and she conformed more to the negative behavior of her peers as she avoided a fear of "being a loser".

Andrea described her time in jail during grade 9 and 10 as a turning point because she felt alone and frightened. "Not wanting to sit and rot in jail", she made a conscious decision to change. She described a growing awareness of time taken for granted and was beginning to envision a future that included finishing school and obtaining a career. This new direction was called "getting a hold of my life" and it represented a new priority of placing school and family first. She had developed new friendships and was avoiding trouble by spending less time with former peers. Although still bored at school, Andrea was becoming more motivated and was striving to find a balance between work and fun.

In a follow-up phone call six months later, Andrea indicated she had left school and was taking correspondence courses while living with friends out of the city.

Linda

Linda, age 17 and sporting a pierced lower lip, was articulate and confident. She and her 16 year-old sister resided with their mother and stepfather. After two years of irregular school attendance and living in two other cities, Linda was currently enrolled in two grade ten courses at an urban public high school after starting the school year with four courses. Her present school attendance record was inconsistent. Linda's mother stated that her daughter had been previously tested but no formal psychiatric diagnosis was made. She felt that the school system was not suited to Linda and it appeared she had given up active attempts at keeping Linda in school. Uncertain about school, Linda discussed plans of leaving school, moving out on her own, and possibly working. Reported conduct disorder behaviors were tealing while confronting a victim, often lying to obtain goods or favours or to avoid obligations, stealing without confronting victims, and running away from home overnight at least twice while living in the parental home.

Linda felt her behavior problems at school originated in grade seven with the development of new friendships and she associated with a large group of peers who regularly gathered at social events. Linda and some of her friends found amusement in harassing teachers. Initiated into early alcohol and drug use through contact with a female friend's older male siblings, Linda was attracted by the appeal of the cool image projected by older peers. She fitted in with peers by conforming to a variety of problem behaviors including alcohol and drug use. With a defiant attitude that rebelled against authority, Linda frequently argued with teachers and received on-going school suspensions. Although she associated with a large group of male and female peers, she most closely identified with a smaller group of females who frequently smoked pot, came to school high, and skipped classes. Partying and having fun became a priority over school. She highlighted differences between male and female cliques by noting that male troublemakers were showoffs while female peers were more interested in relationships. By grade 10, Linda dropped out of the regular school program and unsuccessfully attempted two alternative programs over the next couple of years.

A return to a high school in the 1997/98 school year produced frustration because Linda felt out of place among younger, less knowledgeable, and immature students in the grade 10 courses. Cynical towards school, she distrusted both teachers and administrators. She was critical of teachers for not caring about students and for not making learning interesting. Relying on outdated teaching methods, she felt teachers were out of touch with today's more vocal, assertive students. While both teachers and administrators were viewed as manipulative and arrogant, she harbored an especially deep resentment toward her current principal for not dealing effectively with students but who instead treated them like trash. She felt compelled to demonstrate to teachers that she deserved their respect and because of teachers' manipulative natures, she thought one had to outsmart teachers at their own game. Linda felt her argumentative nature sometimes led to anger and avoidance of others but that it also helped her to assert herself. She refused to be manipulated by teachers and she strove to maintain an identity of independence and maturity. She distinguished herself from male troublemakers who simply liked to showoff while she simply wanted respect from teachers. After years of listening to others tell her she could be successful at school, Linda had reached the point of giving up school for now to work and gain more independence. She preferred an informal approach at school such as addressing teachers by first names, and she expressed a desire for younger, trendier, and more flexible teachers. The irony of Linda's situation was that she craved a mature recognition at school despite her continuing negative and defiant attitude towards school staff.

Linda described constant tension and arguments at home with her mother. Respecting her mother's commitment to her career, Linda strongly identified with her mother's persistence, stubbornness, and connection to her professional career. Although to others it appeared that her relationship with her mother lacked an emotional connection, Linda respected her mother and felt their relationship was unique because their closeness was based on a mutual understanding of non-interference in each other's lives. Rather than confront Linda any longer, her mother was now willing to financially support Linda's move out on her own. Nothing was said of her stepfather and his involvement in the situation.

Linda perceived school as an uncaring place and she had a strong feeling of not belonging in school right now. Uncertain of her future, she did express hopes to some day return to school as a mature student.

In the third meeting about 6 months later, Linda said that she moved out of her parents' home to an Edmonton apartment and worked for her mother in a law office. She noted an upcoming trip to the United States with her mother. She had dropped out of school but expressed tentative plans for enrolling at a local college with future interests in either psychology or philosophy.

Mary

Mary, age 17 and in grade 11, was registered in two grade 10 classes at a large urban high school. Current behavior problems at school were poor attendance and she had verbally threatened teachers. She resided in a rural home with her father and recent common-law partner along with a 15-year-old female sibling, a 13- year-old brother, and the five-year-old son of her father's partner. Her older 19-year-old sister lived with her biological mother and common-law partner in a small town about an hour away. Mary noted she was taking antidepressant medication and at the time of the interview indicated that several family issues were interfering at school. The initial meeting occurred in the home with Mary and her father's partner while the interview with Mary was conducted in a counselling office at her high school. Reported conduct disorder behaviors were bullying, intimidating, or threatening others, initiating physical fights, often lying to obtain goods or favours or to avoid obligations, stealing without confronting victims, and running away from home overnight at least twice while living in the parental home.

Mary said that she "goofed off" in grades one to three but she felt her behavior problems worsened in grade 6 after her parents' separation when she was age 12 and eventual divorce in 1997. By grade 7 and 8, she was "mouthing off" teachers and principals and was suspended from school at the end of the grade 8 year. In a different school for grade 9, she got off to a better start but changed schools midway through the year and eventually got in with the wrong crowd. It did not take long before Mary adopted this crowd's "I don't care attitude" and she never did homework and often skipped classes. She did not respect any teacher or principal that challenged her behavior so she often argued with teachers that resulted in frequent class suspensions. Her indifferent attitude was also directed at school administration who she argued with and swore at.

Mary's defiant attitude and emotional burden in part stemmed from her need to protect the female members of her family after years of living in a fearful family environment. She had witnessed the physical abuse of her mother by her drunken father and was subjected to physical punishment as a child. Mary grew accustomed to an absent father who constantly broke promises, and she now felt anger and indifference towards him for ignoring the family and for treating her like a child. Mary's "don't care attitude" in grades 9 and 10 was evident at home when she argued with her father and his common-law partners who tried to be substitute mothers.

Idolizing and imitating her big sister's behavior also contributed to her explosive temper that reached its worst point in grade 9 and 10. At this time, she was either constantly high or drunk at school and sat in class with a completely blank mind. She associated with peers who frequently smoked pot, drank, and initiated fights in the school. Mary felt her bad temper often got her in trouble because she would defend her family against any nasty rumors at school. Mary and her sisters looked out for each other and challenged anyone who spoke negatively about the family. If talking did not work, she quickly became angry and lashed out at others. When upset, she experienced an angry adrenaline rush that made her feel powerful and lose control.

Mary's current school situation was described as "complicated" because of all the problems she was dealing with. She was worried about her mother's safety, concerned about her grandma, and would miss her big sister for Christmas. She coped by pushing anger or sadness aside, keeping feelings locked up inside her, and "snapping under tension". Not having enough time for herself, she tended to use her friends as a distraction from the problems.

All the problems Mary faced made her uncertain about completing high school. She had definite goals for her life but the burden of family problems made it difficult to concentrate at school. She felt capable of succeeding and stated a strong desire to help kids. However, she was discouraged at school because of years of "goofing off" and not being able to break the habit. Despite her uncertainty, Mary was finding ways to better cope at school. Violence was no longer her main way of solving problems; she now tried talking first to resolve conflicts by talking and swearing at people had now become disrespectful. She hung out with the same crowd but chose to drink or smoke pot less. As a way of coping at school, she was experimenting with avoiding trouble by spending time with different people including a fun group. When needed, she took a break from friends' problems.

Mary spoke of several lessons she had learned from her experiences and above all had learned that she needed to be herself by realizing she was different from her sister and that being successful requires work. She was also aware of unwise decisions about peers and her behavior that created more problems

The third meeting for interpretive validation of the transcript labels took place about 5 and a half months after the second meeting and her situation had changed little. She was expelled from the high school February 1998 for fighting and skipping. Still living with her father and his common-law partner, she was currently working two part-time jobs at a fast food restaurant and pizza place. She had no driver's license or car. She spoke of the possibility of living with her mother and boyfriend if they move closer. Mary said she was staying out of trouble, despite being expelled from school, and was planning to re-register at school in September.

Jason

Jason, age 18, was registered full-time in grade 11 and 12 courses with a 60 to 70% average at a large urban public high school following a turbulent two years of sporadic school attendance. The current school was Jason's third high school and he attended a college for one semester of upgrading as well as three elementary and two junior high schools. Future plans included attending university, possibly studying law. His grandmother built a duplex for the family, after winning the lottery, and since December 1996, he had resided with his grandmother next door to his parents and two brothers aged 5 and 19. A third brother died at age 16 about eight years ago after a fatal blow to the head during a fight. Previous school problems included chronic truancy, being high at school, lying, and stealing. Outside school, he disclosed being involved in break and enters to secure money for drugs. No significant medical or health concerns were noted. Reported conduct disorder behaviors included breaking and entering, often lying to obtain goods or favours or to avoid obligations, stealing without confronting victims, running away from home overnight at least twice while living in parental home.

Jason identified grades 7 to 11 as problematic with grade 10 the worst year of school problems. He traced the origins of the problems to grade 7 after enjoying a positive elementary school experience where everyone was the same. His mother elected to register him in a Catholic Junior High for grade 7 that meant leaving friendships behind forged in earlier grades. Looking back, Jason felt this decision created drastic changes for him as he entered a new school, which left him feeling insecure, alone, fearful, and not fitting in. Grades 7 and 8 were lonely years and he identified himself as a loser. He deliberately avoided the morning rush at school to cope with fear and loneliness. In grade nine, he returned to the public system in a different school, but it was not the school where the majority of his elementary grade friends attended. With a new look and confidence he began to experience being a part of the crowd until loyalty to a lying friend caused him to be shunned again by peers. The continuing isolation he felt was highlighted during a visit to the original junior high school he wished he had attended. Jason was warmly accepted there and was greeted by numerous students.

Jason's entry to grade 10 in a Catholic High School marked his worst year at school. He realized that other options were available other than attending classes and he became lost in the crowd, unknown to teachers. Aimless and feeling out of place, he was accepted by the "going nowhere" crowd. Although he did not particularly like these people, with no other friends he felt he had few options. Despite his misgivings about his friends, Jason was grateful for their companionship and felt they were good people underneath the bad behavior. At least somebody accepted him and invited him to do things. He became increasingly disinterested in school, gave little effort, frequently cut classes and fell behind, which only made him feet stupid the few times he did attend classes. Exceptions to the chronic skipping were his fondness for music classes and industrial arts.

Expelled from his first high school after only two months, he re-registered in a different school second semester and got off to a good start. However, he found some old friends that resulted in him eventually spending school days in the pool hall, having fun, getting high, and pawning and stealing money for drugs. With a few individuals, he became involved in harder drugs, more crime, and by his seventeenth birthday, Jason felt his life was a shambles.

Detached relationships with his family added to his sense of isolation. His brother's death about 8 years ago shattered the family and since then, he has been unable to connect with his father who continues to ignore him. He was subjected to cruelty from his older brother and made to feel like a loser. With an "I'm right, they're wrong" attitude during grade 10 and 11, he avoided his family as much as possible. Jason often had yelling fights with his parents, was beat by his father, and thrown out of the home. His mother over reacted and frequently lost control with him. Today he still feels excluded from the family but has reconciled with his older brother and mother. He was encouraging his mother to leave her unhappy marriage.

Although he finally found acceptance with a bad crowd in high school, he experienced only a surface happiness and was nagged by a strange, terrible feeling that his life was wrong and he was capable of better things. The year before he turned seventeen, Jason developed physical symptoms related to anxiety about his life. On his seventeenth birthday, he realized after moving out of the family home that his parents' didn't care about him. Fed up and feeling down about his life, Jason sensed a serious openness to change and made decisions to try and quit drugs and return to school. Fed up and sick of going nowhere, Jason experienced a need to act on his gut feelings of doing something about his life.

Reflecting on his school experiences, Jason felt his problems were his own doing and not related to the family turmoil. He indicated that the school could have done nothing differently and he had recently experienced frustration in attempting to help other troubled teens. He found that some adolescents have a teenage image hang up making it hard to talk to them.

Jason's lonely and fearful junior high experiences resulted in connecting with an undesirable high school crowd that led to skipping, drugs, fighting, and stealing. He was now attempting to put his "wrong life" behind him as he renewed his commitment to school and to improving his life.

The third meeting for interpretive validation of the transcript labels took place about 10 months later. He moved out on his own and reported improved relations with his family. He was registered in high school for two months in the fall of 1997 but did not complete the courses although he expressed satisfaction about the school and teachers. He tried a 10 week course after Christmas but was unable to complete it because he missed 2.5 weeks of the course and the teacher suggested he drop it. At this point, financial constraints including a car purchased in March were taking priority over staying in school, but he remained out of trouble and worked full-time at a department store. Jason was not entirely confident and optimistic about being able to return to school, as he was a year ago.

Cameron

Cameron, age 15, was registered full-time in grade 10 at a large urban public high school. Current problems reported by the school were poor attendance and allegedly being high at school. Cameron' parents separated when he was age 10 and he now lived with his mother and younger 13 year-old brother in a two-bedroom apartment. His mother was unemployed and on social assistance, and he occasionally saw his father who resided and worked in the same city. Cameron was registered in four courses this term but was reportedly failing each one. Cameron' mother felt her son's problems began in grade 4 or 5 with fighting at school and acting out behavior that coincided with the parental separation. She noted that Cameron began skipping school at the end of grade nine and the school was not accepting of his clothing and appearance. On probation for a previous shoplifting charge, Cameron was previously ticketed for public alcohol consumption and harassment of pedestrians. Previous charges included possession of a stolen bike and trespassing. She stated that a year ago an application was made to a local child and adolescent treatment center and that their name was on a wait list for community counselling services. Cameron' mother indicated she suffered from depression. No significant medical or health concerns for Cameron were noted. Reported conduct disorder behaviors included bullying, intimidating, or threatening others, stealing without confronting victims, and often truant from school beginning before age 13.

Cameron felt that grade four was a difficult year because of the increased academic demands and he said that reading, writing, and especially math were more difficult for him. He described a learning disability in math, which meant it took more time for him to learn math. Even now, Cameron felt learning was difficult because he has problems remembering what he learned. Unmotivated at school, he complained of learning nothing in junior high because teachers were not willing to help him. Instead, he was given a calculator and expected to do what he could. In high school, he was pleased with his helpful grade 10 teachers who were trying to get him caught up from what he missed in junior high. He was impressed with a math tutor in grade 10 at school who actually worked problems through with him and showed him specific steps in working out math problems. Laziness and a tendency to sit and stare in class were given as reasons for his current low marks.

Cameron traced the start of his behavior problems to grade 7. In elementary school, he had no after school friends and in grade 7, while kids met at parties he stayed at home on weekends not knowing any better. Used to being alone prior to junior high, Cameron found himself further isolated because of being ridiculed by other students who made fun of his "skater" and "punk" looks. In grade 7 and 8, his mounting anger resulted in physical retaliation against people who made fun of him. The bad temper was his way of showing his isolation and loneliness. Outwardly, he appeared tough but on the inside he was quiet and feeling left out. Because he liked fighting he often picked fights that he lost, and he was suspended from school for fighting. A different skater look in grade 8 followed the same school year by a punk look did not make him feel any more accepted at school. In grade 9 out of frustration, he transferred to a different school where he found a group that looked like him. Cameron rejected the idea of "cool" in junior high based on fashion and kept his own unique image to be different and to be hopefully noticed and accepted by others.

Another problem that started in grade 8 for Cameron were alcohol and drugs after a friend introduced him to a gang that often partied. He enjoyed using pot at school because it helped him pass the time and he was able to gain recognition from others at school for making people laugh when he was high. Afraid of being caught high at school, he hid being stoned by pretending to work. He didn't miss much school but he didn't do much work. His drug dealer provided him free drugs at school while at the same time steering himself and Cameron away from more serious problems other gang members got into. His mother in grade seven and eight, phoned in for him when he didn't want to attend school and Cameron was left to do whatever he wanted because of his mother's lax rules. By grade nine, Cameron was often high at school and started skipping classes. At one point the summer after grade 9, Cameron lived on the street, pan handled, and consumed alcohol in public places.

Cameron noted that his mother's expectations changed while he was in grade nine, and she became stricter about school, drugs, and alcohol after his father, concerned about his lack of school attendance, spoke with his mother. Cameron' father encouraged him to attend school and do something with his life. His father is a positive role model for him because his father understood him, completed school, was hard working, and had a successful career. Cameron himself was just beginning to figure out a few things for himself and the positive parental involvement seemed to be provide a stabilizing effect. His temper had mellowed out in high school where appearance didn't matter and he felt liked by others. He had tried in the past few weeks to not come to school high because it only burnt him out and made him tired. He was also realizing that skipping only made more work because you had to catch up.

Cameron described some positive changes happening at school and he had a vision of the near future. Unable to state any long-term goals, he expressed a desire to work part-time at age 16 and hopefully keep attending school. Once laughed at and teased about his appearance at school, he found high school a comfortable place to be and appreciated the willingness of teachers to help students.

The third meeting took place about 6 months after the second interview and Cameron reported moving in with his father the beginning of April after leaving his mother's apartment and living on the street. He and his younger brother moved in with their father while Cameron reported that his mother had a "nervous breakdown" and had been hospitalized. Some school improvements were reported, passing grades from using class more effectively and better attendance, which the school counsellor confirmed about a week earlier. Living with his father was a stabilizing influence and influenced him in attending school

Shane

Shane, age 16, started attending an alternate school and treatment program offered by a local community agency around the beginning of November 1997 after a prolonged two year absence from school. He attended school in Saskatchewan and reportedly attended 5 schools from kindergarten to grade 8. His dropping out of school early in grade eight roughly corresponded with the death of grandfather about two years ago in 1995. Born in Saskatchewan, he never knew his father and his mother passed away when he was approximately age 4, leaving himself and an older brother, now age 24, in the care of aunts and a grandfather. He was raised in a Saskatchewan city and later moved to a large Alberta city where his grandfather died about two years ago. Since then, he lived with an aunt and also with a cousin and her boyfriend.

While Shane felt his behavior problems at school started in grade 5 or 6, his aunt thought the problems began when he turned 16. According to his aunt, Shane demonstrated the following conduct disorder behaviors: bullying, intimidating, or threatening others, using a weapon that can cause serious physical harm, deliberate destruction of others' property, often lying to obtain goods or favours or to avoid obligations, stealing without confronting victims. He was currently on probation for criminal charges received in September 1997.

Shane allegedly had problems with failing to appear and failure to comply with probation orders.

Shane indicated that he experienced learning difficulties in grade 5 so he stopped working after finding grade 4 easy. Art and physical education were enjoyable but he disliked the core subjects of math, science, and social studies. Introduced to cigarettes in grade 6, Shane liked the "cool" image of being a smoker. In grades 5 to 8, he described himself as a "trouble maker" and "bad kid" who lived by his own set of rules. Numerous behavior problems were shown at school including swearing at teachers, arguing, not listening, wandering, starting fights, refusing to comply, using firecrackers at school, and stealing. Gaining attention as the class clown, he often deliberately misbehaved to spend time in the office with other friends. He seemed to enjoy his "bad kid" reputation and liked irritating principals on his bad days when did as he pleased. His actions often resulted in in-school suspensions and after school punishment but his attitude was doing what he wanted, when he wanted. Teachers were described as available to help him, but he frequently didn't want their help and was unmotivated to learn. By grade 8, Shane didn't want to learn and would have rather been elsewhere than school, so he dropped out.

Shane blamed part of his problems on the group of friends he used to hang out with and whom he met at store hangouts. He and his friends would meet after school, pickup friends, and get into trouble that ranged from smashing windows, stealing from homes and school, stealing cars, shoplifting, and throwing things from roofs. He found himself enjoying copying others' behavior rather than being himself and he enjoyed the excitement of trouble and being chased. He had a "didn't care" attitude with his friends and felt cool with a troublemaker identity. He did what he felt like and would do anything peers challenged him with.

At home, members of Shane's extended family moved out and back while he was living there. He listened to his aunt and grandfather and felt treated well by his grandfather. However, he has a secretive nature and holds back things about himself. At home, he hid school problems by lying and pretending that everything was all right at school. Although he was disciplined at home, he still took off when he could to be with friends.

Shane expressed numerous regrets about his life, felt he was going nowhere, and was uncertain of the future. He did not feel proud of his past and was ashamed of some of things he had done. With a sense of lost school time, Shane was sorry for the "bad ass" school label that had cost him the respect of his teachers and he regretted not listening, not paying attention, and blaming others at school. Looking back, he realized that school and life were fun and games but now he was faced with the big question, "Do I want to live my life on welfare or finish school and get a good job?" He dreamed of wanting to be something like a dentist or lawyer and his ultimate dream was a pro hockey player. Shane spoke of the right path that included talking to others about his needs and about his future. He said he had good friends now instead of people who got into trouble. Some of his previous problems still bothered him now at school because he was trying to attend and not argue with the staff.

Underlying Shane's regrets about his life was a desire to turn back time to have a second chance. He felt growing up without a mother had deprived him of someone he could feel close to and talk to. He also missed not having someone to cry to and get advice from. He wished he could have been himself and not have been influenced by older friends.

Shane's advice for schools seemed to come directly from his own school experiences. Teachers and administrators are encouraged to give students a second chance as well as be easy and polite to students. Tips for students included paying attention, listening, not being the class clown, and ignoring the bad kids.

Although Shane described dreams and a desire to change his life, he was really struggling to stay on the right path. Perhaps the loss of his mother then his grandfather had left him confused and wondering who he was and where he was going. Hopefully he can cling to his dreams by staying clear of trouble and getting back to school. I was unable to contact Shane for a third meeting.

Earl

Earl, age 17, resided at home with his biological parents and fraternal 12-year-old sisters in a small city. Both his parents were employed outside the home. Earl was registered in the local public high school taking courses in the morning and working in the community afternoons as part of work experience. He was also taking a social studies course by correspondence. According to the school counsellor, Earl was doing quite well at school now but past problems included skipping classes and social skill problems. The counsellor felt that Earl brought on some of the problems due to his behavior. Earl's parents noted that he currently displayed the following conduct disorder behaviors: bullying, intimidating, or threatening others, initiating physical fights, physical cruelty to people, deliberate fire setting with the intent of causing serious damage, deliberate destruction of others' property, often lying to obtain goods or favours or to avoid obligations, and stealing without confronting victims.

Earl's parents noted that the behavior problems at school began in grade eight during Earl's last year at a local private school that underwent a change in school administration. Earl reportedly had difficulties adjusting to the new environment imposed by the staff changes. Earl attended four elementary schools in three different provinces. His family moved to the Edmonton area while he was in grade four and in grade nine. He was admitted to a hospital program where he attended school for six months and a diagnosis of Asperger's Disorder was made. He was diagnosed with Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder at age five. Current medications were Ritalin and Risperdol. No other current medical or health concerns were reported.

Earl felt his behavior problems at school started in grade eight when he suddenly found himself confused, angry, scared, and lost in his schoolwork that resulted in him giving up at school. He blamed his negative behavior changes on the ADD or Aspergers but was more knowledgeable about ADD. He described it as an up and down rollercoaster ride that caused distractions, being off cue, and stuttering. His current medication, taken since age 5, gave him a sense of control and changed him by bringing out a new side of him. Without medication, people would think he was a freak because he was not all there and was dazed.

Earl felt threatened and fearful as students at school would laugh at him, bully and tease him, and scare him. He felt that others misunderstood him and he was labeled a freak and loser. In grade eight and nine, he felt secluded because his attempts at making friends only resulted in him being pushed away and ignored. He would turn to teachers for help only to be teased more by other students because he cried and was scared. The aloneness was heightened because Earl never really had any close friends due to family moves every three years and he started from scratch in making new friends at each new school. He felt secluded at home since he never kept any friends and was stuck and couldn't get out.

Earl's way of coping at school was to keep up a tough reputation to hide the pain inside from being ridiculed and isolated. Although he looked tough on the outside, on the inside he was scared and sad. He developed a bad reputation from the behavior problems of temper tantrums, fighting, suspensions, skipping, leaving classes, and ignoring teachers. Because of the reputation, he felt teachers didn't like him. He felt picked on by others and another student physically assaulted him one time. Earl directed his anger at others by picking fights he often lost. Although he was an inexperienced fighter and was scared about fighting, he acted tough to protect himself. Even today, he punches lockers to feel better and to release some of the hurt inside. He felt part of his problems were brought on by a weight gain in grade nine because while in hospital, he felt proud of the weight lost only to have the problems return when he gained the weight back.

At home during grade eight and nine, Earl felt rejected by his parents. He did not get along with his father and felt that his parents gave up on him and didn't care. He was a slower learner and needed extra time to complete assignments but did not receive much help from his parents. Earl stated that some of his bad behavior was from rebelling against his parents for the beatings he received from his father between grade four and eight. He was hit for misbehaving and at times had bruises or stitches. People at school asked about the bruises, and he developed a clumsy reputation at school because he continually created new lies to cover up for his father's behavior. He got sick about lying. He got along with his mother, was comforted by her, and talked to her. However, he teased and bugged his sisters to the point that they now hate him but Earl is trying to change.

Despite the behavior problems in grade eight and nine, Earl described a growing sense of belonging at school and home. He felt his relationship with his father improved and that his parents were changed and now respected him. At school, he felt happier because he had formed friendships and was experiencing for the first time was it was like to have best friends. He appreciated his friends because they called and asked about him and he had somebody to talk to. He enjoyed going out with friends as well. He felt that he had some family at school now because of his friends. Earl described caring people in his school such as the vice-principal and the counsellor who talked to him and gave him second chances. He also mentioned a favorite grade nine teacher, Ms. J., who offered help with his problems. Earl was also happy with his higher marks and he found school easier.

Earl encouraged people who work in schools to stay close to students and to give second chances. Teenagers were advised to be calm and cool, stay focused on school, and to be with your friends. He had learned that stealing was wrong, to listen to parents, and to stay out of trouble. Earl's optimistic approach to life was to live through the problems, tolerate the bad, and things will work out. With college or university goals, Earl will need to find a balance between going out, drinking, partying and staying focused on school to achieve to his goals.

The third meeting took place about 6.5 months later, and Earl said that he was still residing with his parents but had left school in mid-May to start a full-time roofing job at $10 an hour. Unfortunately, he was fired about three weeks later for no apparent reason leaving him without work and out of school. He now hoped to enter a seven-month trades training program in the near future. Prior to dropping out of school, Earl said things were going well and he hoped to eventually get back to school. However, he noted that his parents expected him to move out and support himself if he was not in school. He was currently looking for work with the belief he would be living independently within seven months although he did not want to. Earl stated celebrating his eighteenth birthday the previous day and it seemed that drinking and socializing with friends was a prominent part of his life now. Earl appeared pressured to make up his mind about school and his life which are difficult things for an 18 year old who was just beginning to experience some connections with peers.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS

Emergence of Themes

Text Sources

Overall, themes emerged from a semi-structured interview with the participants who shared their experiences over time about school, peers, and the family context. Participants often used the interview to reflect on their past destructive lifestyle and newly emerging positive options. All eight participants were interviewed at a period in their life when they were at various stages of reclaiming their lives from an uncaring attitude and wasted time. Although participants' accounts of the past were filled with anger, their current stories were embedded with hope, optimism, and a desire for a better life.

The Emerging Process

The school experiences of teenagers exhibiting adolescent-onset antisocial behavior emerged as an on-going journey in which common elements or themes were illuminated while at the same time, each participant's experience retained its own unique identity. Each participant story reflected a continuous, evolving process of troubles and setbacks, development and growth, and coping and experimenting that moved back and forth through phases.

Time, people, and location contexts emerged from the themes. Time was evident as participants distinguished between past and present experiences. Parents, peers, and teachers were some of the numerous people involved with participants. Location referred to the home, school, or agencies that intervened.

Participants told their story from their own insider perspective that included how they lived it and experienced it first hand. The participants' inside view was framed against a newly emerging awareness of the outside view, the view of parents, teachers, principals, peers, and the public. Older perceptions of antisocial behavior were being challenged by a growing awareness of the outside view that created a sense of dissonance with their own perceptions. The imbalance added to the process of the participant's attempts to construct personal meaning from their own experiences.

Theme Explication

Phenomenological themes are not objects or generalizations but rather are "more like knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes" (van Manen, 1990, p. 90). The phenomenological approach in this study was used to explicate universal themes or structures of meaning that were common to the experience of the participants. The unique aspects of the participant's experiences were also explored given the individual nature of those experiences. Themes and subthemes emerged from the data using both a holistic, sententious approach as well as a detailed, line-by-line approach. The participants experience is represented in three main themes: (1) the tumultuous entry into antisocial behavior, "**Antisocial Behavior Emerges**"; (2) the chaos of worsening problems, an "**I Don't Care Identity**"; and (3) an emerging attitude of change and hope, "**Striving for a better life**". A theme outline is provided in Table One to serve as an overview of the participants' journeys. A synthesis of the themes appears next to provide an overview and summary of the school experiences of teenagers exhibiting adolescent-onset antisocial behavior. The chapter closes with a discussion of the follow-up interviews to highlight the slow and laboured process of rebuilding a near shattered life.

Theme One: Antisocial Behavior Emerges

Most participants traced the beginnings of their behavior problems at school to the junior high transition. The meeting of deviant peers in junior high school, family-of-origin problems, and personal characteristics were evident as participants' behaviors and attitudes began to deteriorate.

Table 5-1 Map of Themes

- Theme 1: **Antisocial Behavior Emerges**
  - Recognizing When Problems Began: Turn for the worse
  - Peer Persuasion: Power of popularity
  - Family-of-Origin Issues: Problems at home
  - Personal Liabilities: I always was that way
- Theme 2: **I Don't Care Identity**
  - The Worst Grades: I did what I wanted
  - School Was Not a Priority: I didn't care
    - Defiant Females: I hate being told what to do
    - Angry Males: Hiding the hurt
  - Conflict at Home: We just never got along
  - Rejection: Nothing good at home
    - Male Loneliness: No one liked me
  - Belonging: I felt wanted
  - Older Peer Influence: Cool to conform
    - Crime: Caught up in it
    - Dating Older Males: Status with older guys
- Theme 3: **Striving for a Better Life**
  - Hope and Anticipation: Finding the right path
    - Turning Points: I had to hit rock bottom
    - Regrets: I wish I could turn back time
  - Coping Now: Finding a balance
    - Past School Successes: Things started off good
    - Encouraging School Signs: I need to focus on school
    - Trying New Friends: I have other people to hang out with
    - Helpful Adults: Someone looked out for me
  - Adult Advice: Teachers need to help
    - Teenager Tips: Don't take life for granted

Recognizing When Problems Began: Turn for the worse

Interviews with the participants' school counsellor and guardian(s) or parent(s) confirmed the participants' account that few, if any, concerns were present prior to the start of the behavioral problems. All the participants described problems emerging at school somewhere during grades five to eight. This point in the participant's lives seemed to represent the beginning of a downward spiral into an increasingly severe antisocial attitude and behavior.

The four female participants transition to junior high introduced new peers that coincided with non-compliance and arguing at home and school, truancy, and alcohol and/or drug use.

> I don't think in elementary school, I don't think I had any problems. I was really smart and stuff back then but then in grade seven things kind of started to go bad because I didn't want to listen to anyone. I started getting into drugs and drinking and everything. (Linda)

> Probably grade seven, the beginning of the year was okay. I wasn't getting into trouble. I got pretty good marks and stuff, and then I started making like friends or whatever and started fighting with my parents more. I just like started not to really care about anything but my friends and having fun. (Andrea)

> I started smoking and that was considered bad in grade six. It was like the bad thing to do. I don't know, in grade seven I started going to a public school, I went to a county school before. I don't know, me and my friend were big bullies. We'd pick on everyone. (Crystal)

> And then I got into [name of school] for grade six. I didn't do anything at all, I just went to class, sat there and listened to the teacher talk and that was about it. Then from grade seven and eight, I wouldn't do my work, got into fights, mouthed off teachers, mouthed off the principal, just basically anybody who made me mad. (Mary)

In contrast to the females, three of the four male participants felt junior high introduced a feeling of isolation that was exacerbated by perceived rejection from others. Isolation led to loneliness, anger, and seeking somewhere to fit in.

> And after school, I just went home as soon as possible. It always, always got me down and there were days when I'd sleep late just so I wouldn't have to be there in the morning before school started. (Jason)

> Oh man, it sucked. Like in grade seven, I went to this big preppy school. In grade seven I was like a banger and had really long hair and stuff and people would be like "nice hair, nice hair" and I'd go up to them and I'd be like "what did you say to me?" I'd punch them out and then I'd get suspended. (Cameron)

> When I was in grade eight basically everybody would make fun of me cause they didn't understand how I was and who I was, what I did, and I was getting worried cause all my friends didn't like me and I was coming out basically a loner. (Earl)

The fourth male participant, who dropped out of school in grade eight, reported problems beginning in grade 5 with peer connections and antisocial behaviors similar to the females. Despite his premature exit from school, Shane described an escalation in problem behaviors.

> Just couldn't sit down, didn't listen, talked back to teachers. I don't know, spit spitballs and that, just get out of my desk and wander wherever I wanted to. Talk to other students while class is on. Throw stuff at other students and that. And then there was the occasional fighting, just swearing at teachers, swearing at other students. Always getting sent to the office or an in-school suspension. (Shane)

Summary.

The majority of participants felt the beginning of their problems corresponded with the transition from elementary to junior high school. A new school setting introduced a different set of peers that provided a persuasive pull in a destructive direction.

Peer Persuasion: Power of popularity

All the participants expressed awareness that peers acted as a magnet that drew them into trouble. This initiation phase into problems involved alcohol and drug use, frequently pot, which was often associated with fun and friends that took increasing priority over school and family. The cool image associated with older peers encouraged imitative behavior such as alcohol use or truancy and this behavior was viewed by the adolescents as a way to gain acceptance. Gender differences seemed apparent with the females more easily identifying with peers and feeling liked while the males eventually connected with a smaller peer group by chance or lack of other options.

Four female participants and one male described close connections with a large peer group of male and female peers of varying ages. The females, who portrayed themselves as more socialized than the male participants, made connections more readily with peers in grade seven that brought them in contact with older substance using peers. Two of the females felt pulled away from more stable peers and lured by the thrill of alcohol and drugs.

> I just got out of elementary and everything was so different, people were smoking drugs and drinking and I was just like wow! (Andrea)
>
> I was mostly the one that got pulled out the most out of my friends. I just met people in my school that knew people from the other schools that were the badder people, if that makes sense, and then I hung out with them and that's when I started getting in trouble. Just from parties and stuff. (Crystal)

A large circle of peers for all four females consisted of "cliques" or smaller groups of people each with identifying characteristics. Linda's description of her closer friends and the groups she associated with clearly highlights the social network of the females.

> There was a couple of groups within the group. There was like the prettier and popular girls who always cared about their appearance and bla, bla, bla. And there was like the group of girls who were kind of just like neutral and friends with everyone else. They didn't really care, they weren't really beautiful. And there was my half of the group which was like me and Teresa, and that was about it. Only two or three of us and we just did lots of drugs… We're just like the "potheads" of the group, that was fun. (Linda)

Regular association with more stable peers was limited to two of the female participants. Although their strongest identification was with troubled kids, the wider peer circle included students who demonstrated more controlled behavior.

> We're still like really good friends with all the other girls, but we'd all party on the weekend and stuff and they just didn't go out and do that during the weekdays. (Linda)

Three of the four males described attaching themselves to a peer group following an initial period of isolation and aloneness after entering junior high. Unlike the females, who readily found a niche to settle into, the males found themselves drifting on the periphery until a connection with a deviant peer group was made. The males' feeling of acceptance into a peer group happened at a later grade than the females, occurring sometime during grades eight to ten. It almost seemed like a desperate attempt to fit in somewhere although the choice of friends may not have been personally satisfying.

> They were losers. I mean, I was a loser too, but they were just "go no where people". A couple of them still call me every once in awhile, telling me they've got babies and stuff. But they accepted me so I hung out with them. (Jason)

> I had like three or four friends but I don't know. I don't think they really liked me either. They just didn't, they were just too nice to tell me to go away or something. (Cameron)

Summary.

Connecting with a "bad" set of peers in junior high was perceived as one reason the participants developed antisocial behavior. The reason for involvement with deviant peers differed by gender with females becoming part of a large group of peers that would expose them to the influence of older males. After a period of isolation and anger, the males found a deviant peer group that accepted them and provided a sense of belonging.

Family-of-Origin Issues: Problems at home

Each of the participants described aspects of their families that they disliked or were unhappy about and these family characteristics existed prior to the start of the behavior problems. Seven of the participants felt that problematic family qualities were somehow related to the onset and maintenance of their antisocial behavior. In most cases, specific events or a tragedy was identified that signified a negative change in the family functioning. The weakened parent-child bond at this stage would further erode in the future as peer bonds strengthened.

Two of the males experienced the death of an immediate family member in the past that created lingering instability and friction within the family unit. The accidental death of Jason's older brother about eight years earlier created a widening gulf between Jason and his family. Raised by his grandfather after his mother died when he was four, Shane described a void in his life that haunted him to the present day.

> I mean, we were bad before, but sometimes we'd go bowling or something. We'd actually do stuff as a family but after that (brother's death), the whole family just got shattered. There was nothing left. (Jason)

> I don't know, just like I had no one to talk to. Like no one that I'd really, really want to talk to and I don't know, it's just...left out. (Shane)

Two participants disclosed growing up in a fearful home environment with a physically abusive father. Mary characterized her father as an alcoholic who frequently struck her mother and often used physical punishment with the five children. A close, protective bond formed between Mary and her 15 and 19-year-old sisters, and Mary adopted the role of her mother's protector. Earl recounted former fear of his father from alleged beatings during grades four to eight to ten, which was the four years prior to the start of Earl's severe behavior problems.

> With her boyfriend that she lives with, he's been known to get violent with his girlfriends' kids, with his girlfriend. That's why I moved out to [name of town] last year is to make sure my mom is ok, that he wouldn't hit her or anything. So I had to look out for her there, and my mom told me that I can move back to Edmonton any time I wanted to, but I stayed out there just because she was out there. So I have to make sure she is safe. (Mary)

> My father beat me and my mother, my sisters, well I got hit. I've got marks on my back from a rake. My dad hated me when I was with my friends. I used to have big cut marks on my back from my dad scratching me and my dad gave me stitches in my skull, he pushed me down the stairs. I didn't like it. (Earl)

Detached relationships with parents prior to the onset of behavior problems were evident in three of the females' families. Adopted as an infant without knowledge of her birth mother, Christine's adoptive parents were defined as strict, traditional, and religious, and she never felt loved by them. The remarriage of Andrea's mother severed close mother-daughter ties while Linda depicted a respectful yet less emotional bond with her mother.

> And even on my birthday or Christmas cards from my parents, it would say "from" mom and dad. There was never any love and I know it's a small thing but it really bothered me because it's just not close at all in my family. And all my cousins and stuff, it would be like I wasn't part of the family because I was adopted and they're just rude about it. (Crystal)

> I kind of regretted my mom marrying my step-dad for awhile because it was just me and my mom, after my real dad left. I don't know we just kind of took care of each

> other, we were always together and stuff. Then my mom married my step-dad and he took kind of like my place. It was just them and then there was me. (Andrea)

> We're not really into the really close family type thing where everyone sits down for dinner and we're not into the lets have a really good close relationships with our friends parents or with our kids friends parents or whatever, or with the teachers and everything. She's not into that kind of stuff. She's a really high class, classy businesswoman. The most important things to her is her business and I understand that, she understands that, it's a mutual understanding. So we don't get into each others shit. (Linda)

Cameron' mother, a single parent, confided in the initial interview that depression and financial issues made it difficult to cope with her son's difficult behavior and Cameron acknowledged that for a time 4he was given free reign.

> Before grade nine, like I used to sit there and I'd be like "mom, I don't want to go to school" and she'd be like ok, I'll phone in. So I'd never go to school because she'd just sit there and phone in for me. Then after she phoned in for me I used to go to my girlfriend's place and just do whatever. (Cameron)

Summary.

The adolescents perceived negative family circumstances prior to the onset of behavioral difficulties. Hurt, pain, or emotional detachment with family members, most notably parents, were the common threads in the teenagers' view of their families.

Personal Liabilities: I always was that way

Participants described personal characteristics that seemed to act as a catalyst amongst family, peer, and school situations that contributed to behavior problems. It is not possible to ascertain whether these qualities were dispositional, symptoms of systemic issues, or a combination of both. Some of these attributes were shared by two pairs of participants and included learning problems, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), depression, and repression of emotion.

Cameron related a "learning disability" that made math difficult and Earl pictured himself as a slower learner.

> Math is the biggest problem. I don't know math at all. I'll learn something one day but then I'll come back the next day and I'll be doing the same thing and I'll forget the whole thing. I'll be like how did I do that? (Cameron)

Andrea and Earl illustrated how ADHD symptoms led to poor decision making and difficulty in relating to others. Andrea received a diagnosis of ADHD in grade eight and was not taking medication. She elaborated how her impulsive nature led to surprising and destructive consequences. Earl's parents reported his diagnosis of ADHD was made in grade three with an additional diagnosis of Asperger's disorder two years ago in grade nine. Unfamiliar with Aspergers, Earl explained how the "ADD rollercoaster" made relating to others difficult.

> I just never thought that I'd get caught or I'd get in trouble or like ruin my education or anything like that. I never really thought about it until it happened. (Andrea)

> I don't know much about Aspergers, but I know plenty about ADD. It actually stands for Attention Deficit Disorder. What it means is that when you do things and stuff like that, you always get distracted and you're always off cue and you stutter and stuff like that. (Earl)

Two of the participants shared a similar tendency of concealing their emotions from others. Mary's bottled up feelings from a difficult home life led to explosive anger while Shane felt the absence of a mother hindered divulging anything about himself to others.

> Well, feelings just get pushed aside so other feelings go into that place and then if things build up really fast, then I just snap. I kind of go a little crazy. (Mary)

> A friend of mine that has a mom, I look at their way of life and I look at my way of life. They've got someone to talk to about their feelings and all that. Whereas me, I got people to do it, but I just don't feel comfortable telling them about my stuff and that. (Shane)

The remaining four participants each spoke of distinct qualities that included obstinateness, vulnerability, insecurity and isolation. Linda's argumentative nature often led to confrontations at home and school. Crystal, who was obese in elementary school and later developed an eating disorder in grade eight, felt vulnerable to the influence of others. The recent discovery of her birth name and her current search for her birth mother seemed to represent a lack of identity.

> I'd have an argument with someone and tell them that a cow is blue but I'd argue it anyways just because I have the chance to argue about it. I'm just stubborn. (Linda)

> I'm really easily influenced by people. I know that's one of my weaknesses but I fall in too easily. I don't know how to explain it. I just know that I'm very easily influenced. (Crystal)

> But they look exactly the same and I can't do that in any of my pictures and so many families can do that. I just want to know where I got my eyes from or anything like that. It just bothers me. (Crystal)

Jason's insecurity about himself that intensified upon entering grade seven led to heightened self-consciousness, diminished self-esteem, and a dread of going to school. Cameron' lack of friends outside of elementary school mushroomed into loneliness and isolation in junior high.

> I've always had this little bit of insecurity or something. And then when I went into grade seven, there was all these people that I'd never met before and I went from public to Catholic and it really was different. I'm not sure how, but it was different. I always felt like I was looked down upon. It just got worse and worse you know. I never wanted to be in school because I always felt like people were, maybe not saying things about me, but thinking things about me. (Jason)

> In elementary, friends are different I guess you'd say because in elementary, it's like you're friends with them at school but then after school you usually just go home and sit around you know. But in junior high, you're more with your friends. I never really went out with my friends on weekends like in elementary. (Cameron)

Summary.

Personal liabilities, disrupted relationships with parents, and connection with troubled peers during the transition to junior high were present at the onset of antisocial behavior. The females easily became part of a larger network of peers but the males struggled to find a peer group to identify with. Common to both genders was a strong identification with a group of troubled peers at and away from school who introduced alcohol, drugs, criminal activity, and an indifferent attitude towards school. These developments set the stage for more serious trouble as the participants' peer alliances fostered increased disinterest in school.

Theme Two: I Don't Care Identity

The "I don't care" theme encompasses the participants' passage into more severe antisocial behavior where dominant loyalty to peers accompanied conflict and tension with parents, teachers, and school administrators. School was merely a place to meet peers while a pervasive "I don't care" attitude interfered with academic motivation and achievement. The second theme seems to represent a lethal progression from the first theme when serious behavior problems emerged. The participants' stories reflected a reciprocal interaction between home, school, and peers that led to further breakdowns at home and school and deepening loyalty to deviant peers.

The Worst Grades: I did what I wanted

All participants pinpointed a time period when the school behavior problems were at their worst and six of them identified grades nine to ten. The two exceptions were Shane, who dropped out in grade eight and Linda who had on-going difficulties at school. A pattern of truancy, alcohol and drug use, arguements with school staff, school suspensions, and increasing involvement in crime developed. A suspension from one school and transfer to another only resulted in continuing problems.

The independent environment of the high school provided more opportunities to engage in less desirable behavior as explained by Jason and his newly discovered awareness of harmful options.

> I guess before that, it was just like waking up in the morning, you had to wake up, you had to go to school. There was just no way around it and then I realized that there was a way around it, I didn't have to go to school. I had other options, not that they were good options, but they were there. (Jason)

The descriptions of Mary, Earl, and Andrea highlight the escalating and negative cycle of destructive behavior that included connection with a deviant peer group.

> Grade nine was worse than grade eight and grade seven, and then grade ten was the worst. (Mary)
>
> Temper tantrums, always getting into fights, getting suspended, not doing my homework, stuff like that. (Earl)

> I thought I had changed for the better so I decided I was going to go back to school in grade nine and wanted to like start things all over. I went to [name of school] for about a month and then I started getting into more trouble and more trouble. I started getting into fights and going to EY [young offender center] and stuff and drink more, do drugs more, hang out with really bad kids who like steal cars and do B & E's and everything. So I don't know, I just quit school and I ended up in jail. (Andrea)

All participants reported excessive alcohol and drug use that interfered with school. For some, it caused truancy when peers would become intoxicated during the weekdays away from school grounds. Other participants skipped less school but elected to come to school intoxicated. The frequency and levels of impairment significantly impaired classroom performance. Crystal recalled the devastating effects of sustained alcohol and drug use off school grounds while Cameron attempted to pass his time at school by being high on marijuana. Linda's current focus on partying demonstrated how unhealthy priorities interfered with her motivation to remain in school.

> I got kicked out of school but then I got back in and I never like was bad at school. I just skipped. I'd never go to class. I was usually too drunk or too late or both to even make it to class. I'd just be passed out in some car some where. I was constantly on something, from September to December I don't remember very much of anything because I was so gone. (Crystal)

> I liked the drugs too and I used to like come into class high because that made the class go alot faster and stuff. People would have thought I was funny when I was high because I'd make all the jokes and stuff and people would just be laughing their heads off. (Cameron)

> Drinking, going out to drink and that's about it. Go to parties, that's it. That's all I ever do is just go out and drink and party. (Linda)

Shane was the only participant to drop out of school for an extended period time. After dropping out in grade eight, he remained out of school for two years until being enrolled in a treatment program for adolescents that included an educational component.

> Leaving school? I don't know, I just didn't want to be there. Just rather be walking around at a mall or being at a friends house playing Nintendo all day or something. (Shane)

Summary.

The frequency and intensity of antisocial behavior peaked during grades nine to eleven corresponding with the approximate chronological ages of fifteen to seventeen. During this chaotic period, participants saw themselves as argumentative, heavy into drug and/or alcohol use, and frequently suspended from classes, and for some, suspended from school. Attitudes toward school and teachers were at best, negative and uncaring.

School Not a Priority: I didn't care

All the participants exuded an uncaring and indifferent attitude towards school in the midst of their worst antisocial behavior. Negative perceptions of teachers, learning, homework, and school dissatisfaction were pervasive for each participant. The most prominent aspect of this theme was an "I don't care" attitude that manifested itself in boredom, lack of motivation, argumentative behavior, physical fighting, truancy, and school suspensions. All the participants reported changing schools because of suspensions or a negative reputation created unfair biases from school staff. The disinterested attitudes of peers also ignited and fueled the anti-school mindset. As participants looked back at their experience of school, a consistent disdain of adult opinion interfered with making meaningful connections with teachers.

Crystal reflectively described an omniscient attitude and disrespect for adults that captured the participants' distorted view of teachers. Any attempts by school staff to help seemed to be blocked out by participants. Jason related how his "didn't care " attitude persisted despite a deeper awareness of his wrong choices. Earl's repetitive pattern of negative behaviors was common for all participants.

> When you're in that certain state, you don't care what anyone thinks around you. Like the whole adult thing, you just don't care what adults have to think. All adults are stupid to you. You know everything and you're cool. You don't listen to adults, you only listen to the bad people around you that you're hanging out with. Like I sound like I'm some old person talking about my childhood! It's so true though. (Crystal)

> You know, down deep I knew I shouldn't be missing these classes. I just didn't care at the time. I don't know what it was. I just didn't go to my classes and I went with the wrong people and did the wrong things. (Jason)

> Temper tantrums, fights, ignoring teachers, leaving class without permission, skipping, and things like that. (Earl)

Participants' school truancy, absence of motivation, and lack of effort created a difficult compounding effect as the students found themselves falling further behind academically resulting in frustration, anger, and despair. A paradox seemed evident as the participants lagged further behind, yet, they felt teachers didn't care about them and teacher help was refused when offered. Each participant noted poor relationships with teachers because of negative attitudes and the constant tendency to argue that included swearing, lying, verbal fighting, and receiving class suspensions. Ironically, participants stated positive regard for the teachers' efforts at the time of the research interview but this awareness was totally absent during the chaos of their behavior problems.

The mounting frustration of lagging behind was vividly stated by Andrea. Shane's view of teachers' illustrated the disregard held by participants towards teachers and the refusal of help when it was offered. Participants created the impression that there was nothing school staff could say or do that would have helped. The participants also felt that teachers were often ineffective or boring as shared by Cameron who was disappointed with his junior high teachers.

> I was just getting so frustrated with all the schoolwork and the teachers so I would just quit. I said I don't want to do this anymore. Like everytime I tried over and over again, it would just get so frustrating. I just hated it, it would make me so mad. It would make me really stupid kind of because I didn't understand any of the work. (Andrea)

> My way was just to do whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted, and they were all good teachers. Like they were there to help me and that when I wanted it, but I just told them I didn't want no help and that, and I argued alot with them. (Shane)

> In junior high, they didn't take the time to actually teach me. They'd just go, ok, we'll make you do grade five math. And then every time, if I didn't know grade five math they'd make me do grade four math. So I never learned anything actually in junior high so this year they're trying to get me all the stuff I learned in junior high and high school all at once. (Cameron)

One participant's school outlook, a persistent cynical view that eroded her resolve to remain in high school, was in contrast to seven of the participants who expressed more current optimism about school. Blaming younger, immature students and teachers who could not relate to students, Linda had resigned herself to giving up on school after years of attempting to live up to others' expectations.

> I don't even know if I'm going to finish school because ever since I can remember, I never wanted to be in school. And everyone said oh, you're going to grow up to be something, Linda, you're so smart, stay in school, etc, and I always believed them and always thought yeah ok, so that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to stay in school and I'm going to do this and I'm going to do that, but it never ever works out. Last year for about a day I go to one class, it's like fuck this, I'm going to go out and drink. (Linda)

Only one participant expressed a direct link between her current school problems and worries about family life. Mary outlined a number of family issues that interfered with her ability to focus on school, and she portrayed herself as overwhelmed by these worries. Feeling a need to always be there for others robbed her of time for herself and for school.

> So there's really no time to worry about school. And I have to look out for my mom and for my little sister and my big sister and for my grandma. (Mary)

Defiant Females: I hate being told what to do.

Gender differences emerged in the subtheme of anger shown at school. The four female participants demonstrated an intense antagonistic attitude towards authority figures in the school, namely teachers and school administrators. There was frequent contact with administrators because of serious behavior problems and the females seemed to develop intolerance for authority figures who were perceived as controlling. A strong dislike of being told what to do and wanting adults to "get off their backs" was readily apparent. The female participants viewed themselves as singled out by administrators for behavior the young women felt was not as severe as indicated.

The defiant and daring attitude was evident in Mary's altercations with principals. Argumentative with her teachers, she was often suspended from class and had little patience for principals. Although Andrea had now tempered her negative view of principals, she was previously very irritated at feeling picked on by administrators.

> I just told him where to go, how to get there, told him that he's a real crappy principal and told him to F-off a couple of times and basically just swearing, yelling and screaming at him. (Mary)

> They were ok. people I guess, now that I think about it, but they were just like jerks to me then. They were just people that wanted to make my life, well, I thought they wanted to make my life miserable. Like I thought they always were against me, they hated me, they always wanted to get me in trouble and nobody else. Like I never really did anything wrong, but they always said I did and they made it into such a big deal and I didn't think it was. (Andrea)

The females' unwillingness to listen to adults also applied to helping professionals such as school counsellors and psychologists. These young women confided that there was nothing that anyone could say that would have made a difference during this out of control phase. All the female participants expressed tuning out adult opinion and Crystal related an arrogant, self-centered mindset that blocked out any helping adult.

> When you're in that certain state, you don't care what anyone thinks around you. Like the whole adult thing, you just don't care what adults have to think, all adults are stupid to you. You know everything and you're cool. You don't listen to adults, you only listen to the bad people around you that you're hanging out with. (Crystal)

Peer influence and attempting to conform to peer norms was common to all female participants and Andrea's experience lends insight into how she gradually adopted the defiant attitude of her friends.

> They just hated school, they hated the teachers, they hated everybody that had authority over them I guess. So I just hung around with them so much that I just started to be like them kind of. I got used to doing things how they did. Then I started to hate the teachers and trying to be cool I guess. (Andrea)

Unique experiences related to a defiant attitude were identified for two of the females. Linda held the cynical view that all adults were manipulative and had to be outsmarted at their own game. Consequently, she harbored deep contempt of the school principal who treated her and her friends "like trash" because he would sooner dispose of the problem rather than try to fix it.

> I'd have to be in school for six, nine, no twelve years never mind what I'm going to have to do after I get out of school. That's alot of years of being told what to do by people who just think they're smarter than you. When you're younger you don't

> notice it because that's when like the teachers can manipulate. That's what kids are for you know, parents, teachers, whoever is older can manipulate them into doing whatever you want. (Linda)

Only one female participant recounted physical aggression towards others. Mary's "bad temper" flared up when she felt someone made critical statements about her friends or family members.

> If somebody mouthed me off then I'd get an adrenaline rush and then I wouldn't care what I did. (Mary)

Angry Males: Hiding the hurt.

The males' anger at school seemed related to maintaining a tough guy reputation mediated by peer influence. Unlike the females, the males noted that a majority of their anger was aimed at peers in the form of physical aggression and they reported frequent contact with school administrators for problem behaviors. The role of peers in the males' expression of anger towards others was in two definite forms. For Shane, his fighting was connected to the "trouble maker" reputation and a disregard for others' opinions. When challenged by peers, he responded aggressively.

> And if they keep saying I'm a trouble maker like that, I don't know, I'd just turn around and I'd start fighting with them. I don't know, it's just, my kind of thing, like I don't care what I called and that. I just thought it was cool to be called a trouble maker, to be the bad kid and that. (Shane)

The other source of male anger stemmed from peer rejection. Both Earl and Cameron experienced a pattern of rebuke, hurt, anger, isolation, and retaliation. Cameron, laughed at and teased by peers because of his attire, lashed out in anger at others. Earl also experienced what he termed frequent harassment from other students because of his behavior and he also reacted with anger and aggression. Both these participants attempted to maintain a macho exterior reputation, but in reality, the bad temper disguised fear. Earl's description portrayed an angry exterior concealing a frightened inner person.

> I had a temper because nobody liked me and I'd walk down the hallway and people would be laughing at me and stuff and I'd be all pissed off all day. (Cameron)

> I had to hold up my reputation as a tough guy, but I wasn't actually though. I was a little scared boy. (Earl)

Summary.

A powerful, uncaring attitude toward school permeated the participants' descriptions of school. Underneath the external mask of antisocial behavior for the females was a potent defiance of authority and for the males, loneliness and fear. A cycle of poor behavior, association with peers of similar negative attitudes, frequent office contacts, and suspensions accompanied a negative bias toward school staff. There was a discrepancy between the adolescents view of themselves and the outside perception of school staff. Participants seemed to minimize their actions while externalizing the blame for problems onto school staff who were for the most part viewed as uncaring, unfair, and not genuinely interested in students. Offers of help from teachers and counsellors were intentionally ignored despite an increasing academic lag and mounting frustration.

Conflict at Home: We just never got along

The participants' uncaring attitude and disregard of adult opinion permeated their family life. Six of the eight participants resided in the family home at the time of the interview, one lived with family friends in a different city, and one participant was in the care of extended family after his grandfather's death two years earlier. While three of four female participants lived in a blended family arrangement, none of the males did. Five homes had two adults residing there, either two biological parents or one biological parent and a spouse in a second marriage. One participant lived with his grandmother in a duplex adjacent to his parents and another participant lived with his single mother but his father maintained regular visits.

A lack of warmth and emotional support was depicted in families, and the participants' description of home life mirrored their turbulent behavior reported at school. The teenagers' described anger, yelling and screaming arguments, not caring what parents said, and not feeling understood by parents. Parents' attempts to intervene in their adolescent's school problems were met with forceful resistance and the following transcript excerpts illuminate aspects of the heightened conflict at home.

Stronger allegiance to peers, the transition to junior high school, and increased fighting with parents emerged simultaneously. Once amicable with her mother, Andrea found herself arguing with her mother over countless minor issues and increasingly felt her parents were incapable of understanding her needs.

> I didn't listen to them at all. I just thought they were stupid. Like I thought they didn't understand how I was feeling kind of. I thought they were just too old to understand that I needed to have fun and that I could be trusted if they'd just give me a chance. (Andrea)

An angry and tense home environment was outlined by the participants. Arguments led to heated exchanges between participants and their parents. Jason and Linda elucidated constant friction with their parents that sometimes included physical altercations.

> I mean we fought all the time over next to nothing. But we'd start a big fight and then yell at me and I'd yell at them and I'd say something that hit home and they'd say get the hell out or my dad would grab me and throw me out the door or whatever. (Jason)

> My mom came running upstairs and she's like "Get out of my house, get out!" I was like chill out, whatever, we're not leaving, like just go away and I had too much to drink though and she came in and she's like get out, get out of here. I started pushing her around and get out of my room and I was like pushing her out of my room, she wouldn't get out and she started yelling that she'd call the cops and everything or for my dad to call the cops and all this crap. (Linda)

Parents' attempts at discipline and control were often met with rebellion. A backlash of negative behavior was proclaimed by participants to retaliate against perceived unjust treatment from parents. Earl's rebellious nature was his way of getting even for the anger he felt towards his father.

> I was just rebelling against my parents and I wanted to get back at them, so I just acted tough and beat up people and I'd always get suspended. (Earl)

Past divorce and remarriage or common-law partners introduced earlier a new adult into the family who was now disrespected by the participants. Three of the four females spoke poorly of their biological parent's new partner, even though two of the new unions had occurred prior to the behavior problems. Mary's bitterness toward her verbally and physically abusive biological father was also directed at his common-law partners who attempted, in Mary's eyes, to unsuccessfully fulfil the mother role.

> My dad brought in girlfriends, different girlfriends all the time. He never had just one girlfriend. And they'd always try to tell us what to do, try to be our mom and everything. Then we'd start getting mad at them, telling them off. And that would just cause more problems between the family. (Mary)

The continuing tension with parents eventually led to running or staying away from home by seven of the eight participants. Crystal, who never felt close to her adoptive parents, couldn't tolerate being under the same roof as her "very strict" and "old fashioned" parents and she was constantly on the run.

> I just didn't really talk to my parents really unless I needed a ride into town or something. So then I just started staying in town and not coming home. (Crystal)

Parental frustration and ways of coping were brought to light by two participants. Cameron felt his mother, a single parent, coped by ignoring his difficult behavior and Linda's mother had chosen to financially support her daughter's move out of the family home into her own apartment.

> I used to come home just blitzed out of my mind on pot and like acid and stuff like that and my mom would just be like yeah, whatever, "I don't want to see you like this, go to your room or something". So I'd be in my room and then the next day my mom would forget all about it and go on with her everyday life. (Cameron)

> My mom told me that if I get a full time job and it goes over school, she'd rather I just dropped out of school. Since I'm moving out in January, I have all my rent paid for and everything and if I want any extra money, I'm going to have to get a job, like my own money. I'm going to live in Edmonton somewhere downtown. (Linda)

Summary.

There was a consistent theme of intense disharmony between participants and their parents, whether it was two biological parents, a blended family, or a single parent. The inside-outside discrepancy in views was prevalent at home as participants focused on the unfair parental control exerted on them while downplaying the severity of their own antisocial behavior. The home environment became increasingly tense as a cycle of problem behavior, ineffective parental consequences, and retaliation continued. Running away or staying away from home became more common as tensions mounted. Participants described an emotional distance from parents and stubborn resistance to parents' frustrated interventions.

Rejection: Nothing good at home

A sense of rejection or not fitting in accompanied the conflict at home for the participants. Isolation and peer rejection was a distinct subtheme for three of the males. The main theme of family rejection is discussed first and it includes feelings of exclusion, abandonment, and perceptions of unloving and uncaring parents. The theme exists across time because four participants shared current experiences of family detachment. The home context is important in relation to school because the distant relationships at home coincided with strengthening peer bonds at and away from school. The family-of-origin theme discussed earlier relates to this theme because current family issues voiced by participants were related to long-standing concerns about home.

Two participants shared past experiences of feeling unwanted at home while reporting more favorable, current relationships with parents. Andrea felt abandoned by her parents when she spent time in a young offender's center. While the parents were likely teaching their daughter about consequences, Andrea's reaction was anger and hurt. Earl felt his parents gave up on him and were not sympathetic to his concerns in the midst of his worst behavior problems at school.

> I always thought they were totally turned against me, I didn't think I had any family left and I just hated them for it. Like I thought they were abandoning me and I don't know, I just felt so alone and I just thought it was all their fault. I thought they were leaving me to rot in that place. (Andrea)

> Before my parents would think about if I was ever going to go anywhere in school because I had such poor marks and they didn't think I would actually make it in the world or even get a job. My parents would basically think I was a loner as well, I had no friends. (Cameron)

Four participants described past and present disconnection from their families. Hurt and rejection from a father was divulged by two participants. Jason lamented about the lack of "kind words" in his home, especially from his father and brother. With a history of frequently staying away from home, he still felt shut out by his family. Mary harboured disappointment in her father's string of broken promises that made him undependable and ignorant of her need for autonomy.

> My father is still the same way, I can't do anything right… I'm kind of excluded as far as my family goes. Like Sunday was Fathers Day and my little brother and my older brother and my dad went golfing and they didn't tell me. They didn't ask me, nothing. (Jason)

> He always puts his girlfriend before his kids and he doesn't realize that I'm going to be an adult soon, that he has to learn how to let go instead of always treating me like I'm a little girl. And everytime I want to have a civilized conversation with him, he always gets mad, he never listens. He's just always thinking, well yeah, I'm a dad so I don't have to listen to anything my kids say. (Mary)

Feeling her adoptive parents were overly negative, Crystal felt estranged from her home. Linda rationalized the emotional distance from her mother by focusing on their mutual views of respecting each others' need for space.

> I didn't feel loved at all by my parents. My parents are strange people I think. They have worse mood swings than I do. We can't live together at all. I went there on the weekend, my dad told me I couldn't come back there. (Crystal)

> We're really close just because we understand that we aren't like other people, that we're really close because we're not really close like everyone else. We have the same ideas on things. (Linda)

Shane's losses of his mother and more recently his grandfather, left him detached from any firm family link. He compared his life to others who had parents and speculated about the difference his mother's presence might have made.

> I don't talk to nobody. I just look at the way their life is, their lives are going, they've got a mom to.... It's just like tell them what to do and what not to do and all that. I just kind of felt left out without being with a mother. (Shane)

Male Loneliness: No one liked me.

Peer rejection and a profound sense of isolation from peers were two subthemes related to the male participants. As discussed earlier in the theme, "School Was Not a

Priority", three male participants' fear was hidden under layers of anger from peer rejection. Isolation resulted from a cycle of peer rebuke, hurt, anger, and retaliation.

Rejection from peers was apparent for Earl and Cameron who felt like targets of peer ridicule due to their appearance and/or behavior. Cameron' scorn of trendy junior high school dress and his preference to present himself differently in looks such as "punk" prompted peer teasing. Earl felt misunderstood by peers who teased and bullied him about his unusual behavior that began in grade eight.

> I'd just walk in like this big dirty guy and everybody else would be all sparkly and clean in their like nice expensive clothing. I'm wearing stuff from Value Village and stuff like that, and I just stood out of the crowd and stuff, and nobody liked me. (Cameron)
>
> People would call me a loser and you've got no friends, look at the freak, he's got a mental disability, and I didn't like it. I was scared. I would always run away and cry because I was scared and worried. I was going insane, basically. (Earl)

Pronounced isolation was most discernible in Earl and Cameron' experience of being taunted by peers. For Earl, his disconnection from peers was compounded by frequent family moves due to his father's military career. His frustrating inability to develop lasting friendships created an entrapped feeling at home. The harassment Cameron received from peers because of his different fashion choices led to anger, solitude, and a personally applied "geek" label.

> Just being secluded and not having anything to eat or… I mean like having no friends, being stuck to do all your work but never getting out. That's about it. All the time you're stuck in one place and you can't get out. (Earl)
>
> I wasn't like the computer kind of geek or like the smart kind of geek, I was just like the one that didn't fit in. (Cameron)

Jason's solitude resulted from an inability to connect with peers and he existed in a lonely state of anonymity that allowed floating in and out of high school classes unknown to teachers. Beginning in grade seven he felt insecure and severed from peers.

> The mornings when I got to school, they were the worst because there's this big circle of people talking and I was never a part of it. There were days when I'd just stand there by myself, no one was talking to me. I really didn't understand because

> earlier in elementary, I was just like everybody else. People talked to me, I talked to people, nobody was any cooler than anyone else. (Jason)

Summary.

The participants' conflict at home translated into rejection, disappointment, estrangement, or detachment from the family. A pessimistic picture of families was presented that left participants feeling unsupported and misunderstood. For three of the males, rejection reached into peer relationships at school creating fear, loneliness, and anger. Detached from home and indifferent to school, the participants looked to peers for a sense of belonging and a place to fit in.

Belonging: I felt wanted

Amid the turmoil of antisocial behavior and problematic relationships with adults, the participants turned to peers as family. The formation of stronger peer alliances varied as attitudes toward family and school deteriorated. Six participants, including all four females, described earlier bonds with peers in junior high school that led to increasing behavior problems. The other two participants experienced peer ties in high school when their behavior and school progress were improving.

Peers were looked upon as loyal and supportive in contrast to families who were viewed as cold and uncaring. Feeling replaced by her stepfather after her mother's remarriage, Andrea's priority was being with friends instead of attending school. Crystal asserted her peers were always there for her, something lacking with her parents.

> I felt kind of like alone so I kind of turned to my friends for like support. (Andrea)
>
> They'd stick up for you, even though you got in more trouble. It just seemed like you were wanted by someone. (Crystal)

Any shortcomings of peers were downplayed in favour of qualities the participants' appreciated in their friends. Glossing over peers' problems was highlighted by Jason who hung out with his friends because they accepted him, although he "never really liked them". He admirably defended these peers despite his loose attachment to them.

> They were a good crowd. If you take away the fact that they did drugs and skipped school all the time and just looked at their personalities and stuff, they're pretty good guys. (Jason)

Receiving attention from peers was also described as a positive aspect of friendships. Shane's association with his group of peers provided respect and admiration for his fearless reputation. Among his friends, he had an identity.

> I don't know, just to be in a crowd like just to be known. (Shane)

Forging peer relationships occurred later for two of the male participants. Earl and Cameron, who both experienced peer rejection, began finding friends upon entering high school that coincided with improved behavior and school performance. Unlike the above participants whose close peer bonds led to further problems, Earl and Cameron both found peer acceptance was related to a healthier attitude about themselves and towards school. Earl described the joy of feeling connected to peers at school and having someone to talk to. Cameron, once maligned for looking different, was happier after peers accepted his appearance in grade ten.

> They all understand what I'm like. They try calming me down when I go nuts and have a temper tantrum and stuff like that, but I hardly ever do that anymore. I'm more mature than that now. We do things together, we go to parties, we drink sometimes together. My friends would call me and ask me what I was doing or how was I feeling and stuff like that and I'd actually like that. (Earl)
>
> And now, nobody has a problem with me, nobody really cares about me. You know, well they about care me, they just don't care how I look. Appearance is nothing to them. (Cameron)

Summary.

Peers were regarded and described favorably in relation to parents, teachers, and administrators. Security was found with a peer group who offered acceptance, loyalty, and support. Participants expressed a blind allegiance to friends by expounding their commendable qualities and ignoring or overlooking less desirable characteristics. Although six participants indicated peer links contributed to more serious behavior problems, two of the males related how eventual peer connections contributed to improved confidence and attitudes.

Older Peer Influence: Cool to conform

The damaging influence of peers was present throughout the participants' submergence into and maintenance of antisocial behavior. Participants reflected how their peer relationships drew them further into trouble, and there was a consistent theme concerning the role older peers played in introducing or attracting them to more serious difficulties. A subtheme for the female participants was the ruinous effect of dating older males. Continuing negative peer influence takes place within the context of the other "I Don't Care" themes of not caring about school, family conflict, rejection, and perceiving the peer group as family.

Associating with older peers was connected with getting into trouble. Shane illustrated how his time with older friends was equated with trouble making. Andrea stated a preference for spending time with older adolescents, and her connection to troubled teens persisted in a different school.

> I was hanging around with people older than me, say like by three years older than me or something. A lot of my friends that I hung around with are all older than me. When I was hanging around with them we'd like just go be...I don't know like get into trouble and that or do whatever we can to get ourselves into trouble. (Shane)

> Sometimes I hung around with much older people. Like I'd be like 13 or 14 and they'd be 17 or 18, but not too much, just like a few of them. I never wanted to be around like my same age group. Then I kind of got rid of those friends in junior high but then high school, grade ten, I got new ones but they were same kind of people, always into trouble. (Andrea)

Linda aptly described the attraction of conforming to impress older peers. She felt adolescents aspired to be like older siblings, and her best female friend's older brothers provided an early introduction to alcohol and drugs. Mary regrettably confirmed the negative role model that an older sibling can render because she idolized the lifestyle of her older sister and mimicked her sibling's destructive behavior and attitude.

> Well because if they're older and they're doing drugs and stuff, you always think the older ones are so much cooler and they're so much smarter than you. And you do it

> just because then you think you can fit in with them better or they'll think that you're cooler because you do them or something like that. (Linda)

> Well, just the way she lived her life, like she didn't take any crap from anybody, she did whatever she wanted. So I followed in her footsteps, but it's just she's my big sister, I just look up to her. And I ended up following in her footsteps which was not another wise choice. (Mary)

Older peers cultivated early initiation and escalation of alcohol/drug use and crime. Cameron detailed the excitement of his first drink and marijuana joint in grade eight when a similar aged male friend introduced him to a large group of older deviant peers holding a party. Jason's association with troubled youth included older peers who promoted the use of harder drugs.

> And then like they smoked a joint with me and stuff like that and then I was like oh...it was like the first time I had ever smoked a joint too. And I was like...it was a pretty fun party I thought. (Cameron)

> I started getting into harder drugs later and I'd steal or whatever to support it. Not just from my parents or whatever, but I'd be breaking into places and stuff like that. (Jason)

Dating Older Males: Status with older guys.

The damaging influence of dating older peers was articulated by all female participants that stood in contrast to the males who seemed to hang on the periphery of their peer groups. More mature males aided in both early initiations to problems, such as alcohol/drug use previously outlined by Linda, or in the maintenance or relapse of serious behavior problems.

Crystal commented on both the positive and negative consequences of her male alliances. Her reported sexual assault at age 15 had left a permanent mistrust of manipulative males who "are going to give you drugs or alcohol or what you want". She felt the attraction of younger female adolescents in high school to older males was linked to a "cool" image. Mary found living with an older boyfriend temporarily steered her away from school towards alcohol and truancy. Relationship problems also interfered with school attendance as evidenced by Andrea and her peers.

> Then the grade ten girls think that they're all cool because the grade 12 guys want them. So you just think you're cool. I started skipping all the time and going out with all the grade 12 guys everywhere and getting in trouble. (Crystal)

> And I had some pretty late nights with him [boyfriend] partying with his buddies and most of the time I didn't get to sleep until 9:00 in the morning. So I'd sleep in and I only have classes in the morning, so I'd miss school. So I missed a week of school. (Mary)

> Just like some of my friends would be sad sometimes or I would about boyfriends and we'd just like break up and we wouldn't want to go and face them kind of. (Andrea)

Crime: Caught up in it.

Five participants, three females and two males, were involved with the justice system and two of the young women had been incarcerated in a young offenders' center. Four of the youth were currently on probation and one disclosed past probation. The males reported charges with shoplifting, alcohol-related offenses, assault, and failure to comply with probation conditions. Stated female offenses included alcohol, theft, failure to comply, and possession of a firearm. Two participants indicated never participating in criminal activities and the eighth participant revealed illegal actions but no charges. Seven of the eight participants noted they were in regular contact with delinquent youth.

Common to the five participants' description of crime involvement were the simultaneous conflicting emotions of fear and excitement as they were lured closer to illegal activities and then were caught in a worsening progression of criminal activity. Once the initial apprehension wore off, the thrill and excitement increased as the adolescents were swept along on a torrent of progressively worse crimes. Andrea vividly described how her association with delinquent youth led to the initiation and progression of criminal activity. The novel titillation and stimulation of the moment took precedent over possible consequences for self and others. Shane voiced a development of crime that was closely tied to his peers and their desire for excitement. Jason was initiated to crime by his peers but later chose to steal independently after disagreements with his friends and to support his drug habit.

> It was pretty scary. At first it was just like smoking weed and stuff like that, but then it got more serious like B & E's [break and enters] and stealing cars and beating up

> people and pulling knives on people and just like a whole bunch of bad stuff. At first, the thrill was kind of like really scary but it was still kind of neat at the same time. But that's just how they lived. Like they would always commit like all these crimes and stuff and it was just normal for them and so at first I was scared, but then I got kind of used to it and it was just like a thing to do. Like if we wanted to all go and like get drunk, we'll go do a B & E for some quick cash so we could get drunk, get some drugs, have a good time, go to the bar or whatever if people have fake ID and stuff....just like for extra stuff, go shopping. It's just like whatever the consequence, who cares. Why not risk it kind of thing? (Andrea)

> We'd drive them around to this other part of the city and then they'd like go steal a car, meet us back where we hang around. I don't know, just go drive around it and go like outside of the city and just like do donuts and that and drive through fields. (Shane)

> They'd done it before and just seemed to have alot of cash, so it started off me just pawning off their stuff, but I did steal, and then I asked them if I could go with them and they said yes, so I started to go with them for awhile. Then I got to a point if something would go missing, they'd blame me or something and come after me and I'd have to explain myself. I never did it, so I just said forget this and I started doing it on my own. (Jason)

Recruitment by older delinquent peers, alcohol and drug use, and crime were all present for participants, especially for Andrea and Crystal who reported the most police contact. Crystal recounted her recruitment into crime occurred after running away from home and living with two older female delinquents, well-known to the police. Her account portrayed a manipulative coercion to crime that preyed on her vulnerability of being easily influenced. Unaware of the poor reputation of her recruiters at the time, she felt exploited with alcohol and drugs to commit crime.

> They'd get me to even break into my own house and steal all the food out of the freezers and stuff. I don't know, we did lots of things, taking bank cards and stuff. Do fraud on bank cards and stuff. But we never seemed to have any food but we always had alcohol and we always had drugs. That's what we always had. (Crystal)

Cameron felt discriminated against by police, which parallels the resentment he felt from peers for his unique attire and hairstyles. Living on the street for a few months brought him into police contact for loitering and public drinking.

> The cops on Whyte Ave., they're like discriminative, they're fascists. They look at you, hey, there's a punk guy, he doesn't like cops, let's go get him right. So then they're like get off the Ave. (Cameron)

Summary.

Peer persuasion was evident when participants' antisocial behavior began and peer influence exerted a predominant presence in the maintenance or relapse of serious behavior problems. Older peers were described as exuding a "cool" image worth aspiring to, and participants attempted to impress peers through imitating behavior and conforming to antisocial norms. Alcohol consumption, drug use, and criminal activities with peers furnished an atmosphere of exhilaration that initially intimidated but then later enticed participants to progressively worse crime, substance use, and school problems. Contact with older peers was responsible for early initiation to alcohol and drugs, especially for the females who dated more mature males. For some participants, crime provided money to support escalating alcohol and drug abuse.

Theme Three: Striving for a Better Life

The first two themes represent participants' accounts of past antisocial attitudes and behaviors that seriously disrupted school and home life. Experiences did not take place in a vacuum but were shaped by those with whom participants met. The emergence of common themes reflected a process of reciprocal interaction in which individuals constructed meaning for themselves through a method of social construction, within their relationships and interactions with others. The development of new meaning that affected participants' behavior and attitude was clearly manifested in the third and final theme.

Embedded throughout the interview with participants was an emerging discernment of past mistakes and hopeful aspirations for the future. Participants were in a process of detaching themselves from harmful histories while simultaneously struggling to make sense of the new direction taking shape. Colaizzi (1978) suggests this type of learning is transformational in nature because the individual is changed and transformed by the experience, with an emphasis on personal meaning. Transformations are reflected in insights, changes in beliefs, and through decisions to live life differently. A clearer sense of self evolves from a process of self-identity construction. In the interview, participants were encouraged to reflect on their school experiences and to consider the personal meaning of those experiences for themselves.

The theme, "Striving for a better life," first illuminates participants' growing desire to leave behind a malignant past to forge a worthy future. Regret, shame and humiliation from previous behaviors were countered with optimistic visions and possibilities for the future. Accompanying these positive views of self were various means of coping and experimenting with alternatives ways of interacting with others. Finally, participants offered their advice to adults and teenagers on how to stay clear of or reduce the damage from adopting an antisocial lifestyle.

Hope and Anticipation: Finding the Right Path

The most striking commonality among all the participants was their passionate desire for a better life arising from greater recognition of their sordid pasts. Two subthemes, "Turning Points" and "Regrets" were also evident. Critical events reinforced consideration of other lifestyle options and a sense of regret permeated views of past actions.

Throughout the interview, participants made the distinction between their life now and then. A strong conviction to change issued from a sense of wasted time and opportunities. While the past represented immediate gratification and ignorant choices, the future was expressed in hopeful possibilities and opportunities. Conformity to peer norms was being replaced with discovering a better balance between school, family, and friends. Although contact with some unstable peers remained, participants stated a clear decision to avoid serious trouble such as renewed crime. School, once viewed as a nuisance, was now being discerned as an important goal. Adult opinions, once scorned, were becoming more realistic and others' qualities once disregarded, were now enviously viewed as personal strengths.

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Participants were attempting to construct new identities that contrasted with the previous status of harmful conformity and deviancy. Participants' view of themselves and others was undergoing a slow, erratic transformation towards stability. A growing awareness of the disharmony felt by participants seemed to be shifting their focus from the immediate to the future. Impatience and intolerance of the past fueled an urgency to move on to a more constructive life as described by Jason who reached a definite point in finding a new direction. Earl proclaimed a buoyant approach to life that predicted optimistic outcomes for the challenges of the future.

> Life is full of troubles but you have to live through them, you always have to put up with the wrong things, but you know they always end up being right. (Earl)
>
> I just had this feeling, this openness that I had to change my life and it was very serious, it was kind of dramatic. (Jason)

As participants glimpsed more into the future, unsettling prospects prompted consideration of more rewarding options. Andrea's desire to accomplish something meaningful in her life had overtaken the thrill of a deviant lifestyle, and she articulated determination in freeing herself from the destructive influence of alcohol and peers. Shane, a First Nation youth, began to contemplate a life on social assistance versus being able to support himself after being out of school for a few years. Mary, who had adapted the role of the family protector, voiced a compassionate longing to find a career helping children.

> I don't let it waste, like really waste anymore. I'm not going to drink my life away or just like hang out with my friends and just like ruin my life like that. I want to get a good education, I want to be something when like I get older. (Andrea)
>
> I started thinking about how I'm going to be in the future, what's going to happen and I don't know, it was just a big thought. It was just like I don't want to live like being on welfare and that when I'm older and live that way, a poor life. Or do I want to have a life where I could like instead of being on welfare and that, have a good job, if I have a family, support my family. (Shane)
>
> My goals are to get out of school and I wanted to become a teacher when I was younger and that one changed. Then I wanted to open up a home day-care because I love kids. And then that one changed and then for the past two years I wanted to become a narcotics cop because seeing all those little kids that are 10 to12 years old on crack or heroine, just breaks my heart and I want to do something about that. (Mary)

Learning from past experiences was pronounced by all the participants in the transition from the here and now to envisioning an optimistic future. While Crystal regretted her past experiences, she also reflected on gaining good from the bad and acquiring knowledge that would help her as a parent.

> I know it's like all bad, but then again it's not all bad that I experienced some of it because I think something bad is going to happen sooner or later and I think it's good

> that it happened when I was younger. I don't know, maybe something bad is going to happen when I'm older, but I've gone through it and if I have kids and stuff, I can actually say I've been there because my parents couldn't understand it at all. (Crystal)

One participant's outlook on the future was more self-focused as she strove to find a school setting to fit into. Linda, cynical of adults' motives, claimed she was better suited to a more mature school environment like a college where she would receive the adult recognition she was seeking. This viewpoint seemed to be a realistic appraisal of her strengths and limitations.

Turning Points: I had to hit rock bottom.

Three of the participants outlined a specific life event that produced dramatic changes in their life blueprint. These turning points contained common elements: feeling discontented and "enough is enough", isolation from friends and family, predicting a calamitous future, and a colossal determination to change.

Two females recounted how spending time in a young offenders center led to life changing revelations. Andrea, who described herself as impulsive and ignorant of consequences, experienced fear and sadness at the grim, intimidating jail environment. The crushing consequences of her previous harmful behavior became frighteningly real, and she withdrew from crime in part due to avoiding a return prison visit. Crystal loathed incarceration because of losing dignity from feeling treated disrespectfully like an animal. A sense of not belonging sprung from comparing herself to the "slutty" girls in jail. It was not until this shame and degradation that she was willing to accept help.

> But once I was in jail, that's when it really hit me that I was like, no, I can't do this anymore. So I couldn't, I was so sick of it, my life was like a total mess. It was pointless. (Andrea)
>
> I just realised I didn't want this, this isn't how I wanted to live my life, I needed to do something about it. I didn't want to sit and rot in jail. (Andrea)
>
> I wouldn't listen to any counsellor when I was going through the whole thing. You know like, I had to hit rock bottom myself. (Crystal)

Jason's awakening to a new direction was similar to the above female experience but he experienced a profound shift following a feeling something was "eating inside of him" about his wrong life. While high on drugs on his seventeenth birthday, Jason found himself disconsolate about his life a few months after moving in with a male roommate. Out of his anguish arose an intense beckoning to reconcile his life. He reflected on the dismal aspects of his life and elected to make some changes to counteract the disturbing, nagging sense of being capable of much better.

> I started to realize, it was two months after I'd moved in with him and it just kind of hit me, my parents never called once, not even once to see how I was doing, ever. And I thought the last two times I moved out they never called either. They just don't care. So that really started hitting me [pause] and then I just started thinking about my life and where it was going and stuff. So the more I thought about it, the more it got me down. There were alot of things to get down about, so I just, school was my first choice. Well, quitting drugs was my first choice. (Jason)

These participants amplify the vigorous motivation for change after a critical life event that is accompanied by a sombre declaration of regret.

Regrets: I wish I could turn back time.

Four participants, including the three youth with significant turning points, disclosed noticeable regrets about the past that seemed closely connected to "hitting rock bottom". Participants expressed shame, embarrassment, and frustration over wasted time that resulted from a fixation on fun and friends at the expense of school commitments. The adolescents reflected on how life had been totally taken for granted as valuable time was wasted on pointless pursuits. In reaching a point of antisocial saturation, the teenagers became uncomfortable about their lifestyle and were beginning to earnestly discuss ways of improving their lives.

Shane, who left school in grade eight, had feelings of loss about school that were common to the four participants. Feeling remorse for his disrespectful treatment of school staff, he also harbored shame about his criminal activities and blatant disregard for school. Having lost personal pride, Shane felt his life was going nowhere and he lamented about the detriment of his "troublemaker reputation" when queried about the most important life lesson from his experiences.

> Like say you're arguing with the teacher, it hurts their feelings when you, like when you're arguing and you call them a bitch or something or just call them down and all that. It doesn't make the teachers feel too good and it don't make the teachers feel too good about you. They don't really respect you anymore. You're just labelled like a bad ass in school and that. I thought it was pretty cool to be labelled that, but not no more. (Shane)

The painful awareness of lost time revived interest about the importance of school. Andrea felt a strong urge to gain back control of her life after wasting time in jail. She commented on the hard lesson she had learned about the consequences of taking life for granted and the need to take responsibility for her life. Crystal encountered embarrassment while talking about her past exploits and she too, mourned the time wasted to foolish actions.

> I'd just been slacking off for so long, not doing anything with my life, it was just like passing by right before me and I didn't even realize it. It was like such a waste of time. (Andrea)

> So I never made it anywhere. It was just a big waste of time. The whole two years was just the biggest waste. If I would have went to school all that time I would have graduated by now. (Crystal)

Two male participants pondered how their lives might have been better based on the impact of a specific past event. While Andrea and Crystal acknowledged the damaging consequences of their pasts, Shane and Jason felt like victims of an event that radically changed their lives. Jason considered the ramifications of his mother's choice to switch him to the Catholic school system in grade seven that separated him from elementary grade companions. Shane felt the death of his mother deprived him of someone to provide guidance and emotional support, creating speculation of a different life.

> I'd just go and turn back to 1985 or 84 so that my mom never died. My mom could still be alive to this day right now. My life, I don't know, my life would probably be "a lot" different if my mom was alive. (Shane)

> So I would have known alot of people and I had lots of friends and I really think my life would be drastically different if I would have gone to that school. (Jason)

There were two voices of uncertainty amidst all the optimistic dreams of the future. Shane's vision of a career would require considerable more time to finish school. Mary's discouragement about the difficulty in breaking the old habit of "goofing off" and whether she could now she academically succeed, highlights the challenges in overcoming self-inflicted obstacles.

> School is just too hard. I know I have the ability to do it, it's just goofing off for so many years. It's kind of hard to get out of the routine of doing it and this year kind of got shot because they gave me two spares and only two classes, and then well, if I only have two classes, what's the point of going since I have two spares? (Mary)

Summary.

The theme "Hope and Anticipation" marks the participants' beginning transition from strife to stability. Antisocial behavior, once viewed as cool conformity, was now scowled upon with disbelief, shame, and regret as participants grew increasingly aware of wasted time. The immediate importance of the peer group was being replaced with by a future outlook that craved school, a career, and a more meaningful purpose in life. Three participants "hit rock bottom" before awakening to an alternative, goal directed lifestyle while two other participants focused on one specific past event that possibly introduced negative influences in their lives. Uncertainty lingered for two participants about overcoming barriers from past damaging habits.

Coping Now: Finding a balance

Hope for a better future manifested itself in participants' current coping behaviors that challenged the history of maleficent actions and attitudes. The behavioral changes were not as dramatic as the above attitude changes, but participants shared incidents of positive adjustment that were congruent with their transforming beliefs. The different stages of participants' search for a better life were magnified by the large number subthemes generated in this theme.

Some coping actions were carried out in one setting such as school. Shane's current goals after returning to school were maintaining attendance and listening to the teacher following his prolonged two-year absence. Cameron was proud that he had been at school the past five weeks without being high on marijuana. In contrast, Linda's method of coping was to leave school next semester for work after deciding she didn't belong in high school.

Coping for three female participants was applied at home, school, and the community. Realizing the necessity of choosing her battles carefully to maintain family peace, Crystal had the discovered the value of temporary conformity to survive in the moment. Andrea, who still found school boring, now got through one class at a time by striving for a balance between fun and work. Mary was attempting to tame her temper with talking instead of aggression.

> You do have to be what other people want you to be in some ways to get by, but you won't always have to do that. So if you just do it for all the time that you have to, you can deal with it. (Crystal)
>
> Just to keep in mind that fun isn't everything you know, it has to be like some work and some play kind of thing, you know. Not everything can just be fun, I guess. (Andrea)
>
> Usually when something bad happened like someone did something, I'd punch them or do whatever. Now I try to sit down and talk with them, ask them why they did this, why did they do that, what can we do to solve this, and if the first time being nice doesn't work, then I get aggressive. (Mary)

Coping with the help of medication was an effective survival tool for Earl who suffered from attention/deficit-hyperactivity disorder and asperger's disorder. The "rollercoaster" effect of the ADHD symptoms was stabilized by the medication, giving him control over his behavior.

> When I take my medication, that helps, always changes you, you're always having a good day, you never have ups and downs. Medication just takes control of you. You have a whole new side of you. (Earl)

The above experiments with coping in new ways may be viewed as the development of a new set of healthier survival skills that contradict a former antisocial lifestyle.

Past School Successes: Things started off good.

Positive aspects or minor successes at school during the "out of control" phase were reported by a majority of the participants, despite the generally repulsive attitude towards school. Six of the adolescents either found some aspect of school more appealing or strove to stay enrolled.

Certain subjects were more palatable than others as was the case for Shane who preferred less rigorous subjects such as art and physical education. With little motivation to maintain attendance in grades ten and eleven, Jason made an effort to frequent classes he enjoyed including industrial arts and music.

> I guess it was band, played the clarinet. I don't know why, I just liked music so it was kind of fun. (Jason)

Participants' described successful starts and setbacks at school. A new grade and at times, a new school, provided a fresh beginning that eventually succumbed to further behavior problems. Mary's move to a new school in grade nine typified the participants' experience of temporary attainments in a new school and grade.

> The first half of the year for grade nine I did my work and got caught up and everything and then I left [name of school] and then I went to [name of school]. Things started off pretty good there and then I just started hanging around with the wrong crowd, drinking, smoking drugs, and skipping school, mouthing off teachers, getting kicked out of class. (Mary)

Seven of eight participants maintained a school connection throughout their worst behavior problems. In spite of frequent truancy, class and school suspensions, and poor attitudes toward most school staff, these adolescents kept coming back to school. The effort to sustain some form of school tie was exemplified by Crystal who requested to write final exams while residing in a group home.

> I ended up writing my finals for that year in the group home. So I like didn't make it through the whole year but they let me write my finals anyhow and I was in the group home because I asked them. (Crystal)

A majority of participants strove to stay in school and achieved small successes among other pressing emotional and academic problems. Current school behaviors and attitudes were slowly improving as participants achieved a better balance.

Encouraging School Signs: I need to focus on school.

Five participants mentioned improving school attitudes and conduct. A revitalized awareness of the importance of remaining in school and specific behavior improvements were further signs that a significant life shift was in progress. As the teenagers became increasingly distraught about their pointless lives, they gave serious consideration to school as a worthwhile alternative.

The theme name flows from Crystal who had been kicked out of her parents' home, spent time in residential treatment, and had been previously imprisoned. Her reformed attitude now proclaimed school as a way to more freedom in choices and a better alternative to alcohol and drugs. Shane's desire for financial independence highlighted the youths' budding awareness of the long-term financial gains through obtaining an education.

> You have to focus on your school when you're in school because now a days, you're going to have to pay alot of money to go back. You can't even go back to high school after nineteen and you can't get anywhere without your school anymore unless you want to work on the rigs or something. You have to stay in school. (Crystal)

> I want to get my education back so I could have a good job in the future. And I won't be a bum in the future and have my own house, have enough money for all my stuff so I won't be going to my aunt and that and say can I borrow $20? Can I borrow $100 for this and that? (Shane)

Sensibility about the deleterious effects of skipping was helping some participants improve course grades due to enhanced attendance. Both Cameron and Andrea related the connection between attending and passing courses. Cameron' changing perception of skipping made him aware of the "catching up" backlog created by chronic truancy.

> I thought skipping would make school go by faster, but it just ends up giving you more and more and more work to do cause now I'm catching up on stuff that I had to do at the beginning of the year which I didn't do because I didn't go to school. (Cameron)

Part of the better life search involved altering perceptions about the value of education and undertaking behavior changes at school. The participants' shifting views and actions at school represented small but significant life modifications.

Trying New Friends: I have other friends to hang out with.

The toxic attraction of deviant peers was slowly being replaced by expressions of commitment to school and future goals. Part of the transformation process involved either abandoning or diminishing contact with former peers to make room for relationships with more stable youth. Five participants conveyed how contact with different peers was aiding their journey to stability.

Two participants, Earl and Cameron, were experiencing their first successful peer relationships in high school after a secluded period of peer rejection and anger. Their stories were recounted in the earlier theme, "belonging", but the impact of the positive peer connection is relevant here because of the beneficial effect a sense of connection was making on their adjustment in and out of school. The perilous road from rejection to acceptance made them both feel comfortable and secure in a school environment previously regarded as hostile. Earl's thoughts about friendship radiated his enthusiasm about having a place to fit in.

> Best friends are like, best friends will stick with you for the rest of your life, you'll always get to know them. (Earl)

Experimenting with new friends and lessening contact with old harmful peers was cited as a means of coping at school and as a way of avoiding a disastrous slide back into trouble. Mary's connection with three different peer groups in her current high school provided options and a break from one group if they upset her. One of her present group of friends were "always fun" and provided laughter relief. Andrea expanded her circle of peers to include new stable friendships while maintaining contact with former troublesome peers. Her new priority to get her life in order enabled avoidance of being sucked back into the antisocial whirlwind.

> I just don't want to hang out with one crowd and then if they go off and do something I don't want to do, then I have other people to hang around with. (Mary)
>
> If I see them at a party, of course I'm going to talk to them and stuff, but I don't really like make plans with them anymore or anything cause I know that if I start hanging out with them again, it will kind of like bring me down. I guess like get me caught up in the same bad stuff again. (Andrea)

Developing new relationships with more stable peers, less contact with older negative peers, and increased insight about the detrimental influence of previous peer connections led to improved school performance and diminished antisocial behavior.

Helpful Adults: Someone looked out for me.

Only three participants, one female and two males, shared how caring adults were currently influencing their decisions and actions. Participants acknowledged admirable contributions from parents or school staff in the form of support, encouragement, role model leverage, and help with schoolwork.

Two participants described parents as providing role model values that positively swayed emerging changes. Although the visible tumultuous relationship between Linda and her mother gave an impression that a wide rift separated the two of them, Linda felt close to her mother and admired her persona. In her own way, Linda expressed her respect in the commonalties they shared, and her mother was financially supporting Linda's move to an apartment. Rather than struggle with Linda to stay in school, Linda's mother provided a job for her daughter in her office.

> We're really close just because we understand that we aren't like other people, that we're really close because we're not really close like everyone else. We have the same ideas on things. (Linda)

Cameron attributed the role of his father as the most important element that helped him improve his school behavior. Recently more involved in Cameron' life after a divorce six years ago, he was playing a more active role in promoting school attendance. Cameron' father, university educated and successfully employed, provided a role model that Cameron was now more receptive to. Cameron related how a lesson from his father was instrumental in sparking a shift in his views about school.

> We were driving downtown and there were these guys panhandling and stuff, like freezing their asses off. And my dad is like, "Do you want to be like him or do you want to be like me when you're older?" And then I was like, " I guess you". He's like, "There you go, the only way you can do that is if you stay in school and do better". (Cameron)

Earl's recent and comfortable connection with peers in high school was partnered with a sense of caring from the staff of his current school. He appreciated the daily, friendly greeting from an administrator in the hallway, the willingness of teachers to individually work with him in class, and support from the school counsellor.

> There are teachers that actually care, and try helping me and that's what I'm happy about. Because in the other schools, especially in grade eight, none of the teachers cared and none of them would help so I always got suspended. (Earl)

The three participants who were presently accepting help from adults were influenced by care, support, encouragement, and the presence of an important role model. The absence of positive adult influence for other participants raises the question of whether the youths' emerging hope for the future can be translated into actions without perceived adult support.

Summary.

Participants were initiating small but encouraging behavioral changes as they strove to unleash themselves from a destructive cycle of antisocial ways. Successful coping was occurring in numerous ways such as: recognizing the validity of adult opinion; improving school attendance and attitude; toning down defiance and anger; experimenting with new friends; and allowing caring adults to intervene.

Adult Advice: Teachers need to help

Each interview concluded with an invitation to offer suggestions for parents and teachers about how to best help teenagers with serious behavior problems. The most advice was directed towards teachers, but ideas for parents surfaced as well as recommendations for adolescents in the subtheme, "teenager tips".

Male and female participants singled out three common teacher qualities: helping, patience, and offering second chances. Despite participants' refusal to accept help, these adolescents encouraged teachers to help students whether it was for extra individual assistance with academic matters or the willingness to ask students if they wanted to see a counsellor. Earl's plea for patience was a chapter right out of his school experience where caring staff had afforded him many opportunities to succeed.

> If somebody looks like they're having troubles, like with the work or anything, ask them why. Ask them if they need extra help or ask if they need to be in a different course. (Andrea)

> Bring them in with their parents and that, sit down, talk to them, ask them if they'd like to have a counsellor or something like that. (Shane)

> Take care of the kid, stay with them all the time, give them a chance if he's having any problems and needs somebody to talk to or if he gets into trouble and he needs a chance to, a second chance to get back in life. (Earl)

The female participants provided more ideas and a greater variety of suggestions. The benefits of noticing positive behavior and giving compliments to students was exhorted by Crystal as the key to motivating students to address poor behavior. Her comment highlighted a way to break the typically negative interactions with teachers. Mary's advice reflected the personal connection she desired with teachers possibly due to the discord in her family home. She favored a patient, caring, and humorous teacher who took time to ask about her life outside the school.

> When someone compliments you, it seriously helps you out a lot because you can still fix the bad even though no one is like hounding you, telling you about the bad. (Crystal)

> Some teachers try to actually help a student like getting them set up with counselling and just there when the student needs a friend. And some teachers try to force it out of you like push you and push you until you can't take it anymore and you just start yelling at them and they just stick their noses in where they don't belong. (Mary)

Linda offered the most teacher advice possibly because she voiced the greatest level of cynicism towards school. Her proposals centered on how teaching styles had not kept pace with the evolving students of the "90s" resulting in outdated teachers. She preferred younger teachers who communicated better with students and were trendier in fashions. Flexibility and influence were two highly regarded teacher characteristics.

> You just have to be like a little more open-minded about things instead of going exactly by...Like Dead Poets Society, did you see that movie? He was a good teacher because he kind of went by his own schedule instead of...just maybe make things more fun. You have to have more teachers that make a bigger impact on people. (Linda)

Not all comments about school staff were negative. In fact, all the participants gave approving comments about teachers or administrators and six participants recalled one specific teacher they had especially appreciated. Favorite teachers were characterized as caring, understanding, helpful, and affording second chances. Even the cynical Linda named a memorable grade five teacher who was firm but funny.

> She was just really, really, really nice and she knew how to talk to people and how to handle things and she was a real bitch sometimes too, but I mean, everyone gets like that. But she knew how to be a bitch and be funny about it. (Linda)

The two participants who volunteered parent suggestions advised of a need for flexibility in setting limits. Crystal and Mary both thought parents should not set unreasonable expectations because teenagers are then prompted to go out of their way to break the rules; alcohol consumption was one example noted. Mary expressed the need for effective communication between parents and adolescents, possibly out of her frustration with an absent father.

> If your kid needs to sit down and talk, actually sit down and talk with them, have a discussion with them instead of just blowing them off because they've had a bad day or cause they just don't want to hear it. I can understand if you've had a really, really tough day and it's just one more thing is going to make you snap, I can understand that. But never having a conversation with them can just blow their minds away, think oh yeah, well you don't care enough to talk to me. (Mary)

Jason was the only participant who did not offer adult advice for dealing with troubled teenagers. Exonerating his parents and teachers, he blamed himself for the school and home problems.

Teenager Tips: Don't take life for granted.

Not all advice was aimed at adults as four participants reflected on lessons they wanted other teenagers to hear. As with the adult advice, the following instructions represent the regrettable life blunders made by participants, and these experiences were at the heart of their current discontent and attempt to change.

From remorse about leaving school in grade eight, Shane asserted the importance of remaining focused on school and the need to ignore "bad kids". Earl's simple, direct statement about self-control stemmed from an explosive temper that erupted after tortuous teasing from other students. Andrea's important motto for other teenagers was to avoid the difficult lesson she learned about taking life for granted.

> Pay attention in school, listen to the teachers, do what you're told to do, don't mouth off, just mainly listen and pay attention to your teachers and all that. Don't be like a class clown and start spitting spitballs and that. I don't know, it took me time to get myself together and that. (Shane)
>
> Stay calm and keep your cool. Don't do anything stupid that you'll regret. (Earl)
>
> Not to take your life for granted kind of. I don't know, it's so easy to just waste it and like you think you're not wasting it because you're having too much fun, but you really are I guess. It's stupid, like when you just stop and think about it, really think about it. Sometimes you have to learn the hard way. But, I don't know, that's what I had to do. (Andrea)

Summary.

Andrea's painful realization above is a fitting end to the thematic analysis because it represents the participants' transforming view of self and others that was emerging. Participants' suggestions for others arose from difficult, personal experiences. They stressed a need for understanding, compassion, and flexibility from others that was perceived as lacking in previous relationships with adults. Greater insight about themselves was now opening doors to self-examination and the consideration of new, pressing priorities such as school and securing a stable future.

Synthesis of the Adolescents' School Experience

The intent of this study was to focus on the inside perspective of youth and the meanings of their antisocial behavior at school, but the participants' stories expanded to include home and community contexts. The school experiences of these youth were embedded within a wider story of the tumultuous entry into an antisocial lifestyle, the destructive influence of worsening behaviors, the painful awakening to wasted time, and a strong desire for change. Reflections on the meaning of the student experience brought the inside view to light, allowing access to the interior worlds of eight teenagers with a history of adolescent-onset antisocial behavior. The interviews offered a space where talking about the experience allowed a distancing from events and an opportunity for retrospective reflection, much like viewing a videotape of important aspects of one's life.

The evolving nature of the adolescents' lives was set in the contexts of time, people, and places. The past and present were shaping the future. Influential reciprocal interactions occurred with other people in the contexts of the family, schools, hospitals, community, professionals, and the public.

Three important fibers were woven throughout the participants' reflections of their experiences. Most prominent was the fiber of *distance*; distance from the event to enable reflected responses and distance from others seen through inside/outside differences. The fiber of *connection* was evident as participants sought validation and support from peers while distancing themselves from adult opinion. As time progressed, connectedness to a widening audience was occurring as participants increasingly acknowledged the value of others' beliefs and opinions. *Meaning* was an important fiber because a distressing lack of meaning in life was driving participants to leave behind their antisocial demeanor. Participants were struggling to make sense of their lives by reflecting on their experiences and through beginning to absorb new outside perspectives, within the framework of their own perceptions.

The stories of being a teenager in school with adolescent-onset antisocial behavior started when serious behavior problems emerged around the time of the transition to junior high school. Participants recognized their attitude towards school began to decay partly due to negative peer persuasion. The path to developing connections with dysfunctional peers differed according to gender. For three of the four males, junior high school introduced feelings of isolation from peers that lead to fear, loneliness, and anger. Peer rejection and the resulting fear disguised as anger, lead to behavior problems that escalated when connection to troubled teens was made. Later association with deviant peers occurred as a last resort to find somewhere to fit in. The females seemed to become easily established within a larger group of peers who lead them into alcohol and drug abuse, crime, and school related problems. Family-of-origin issues revolved around emotional detachment from parents because of marriage breakdowns, physically or emotionally abusive parents, or not feeling loved by parents. Personal liabilities, including learning problems, psychiatric disorders, and temperament characteristics, interacted with school, peer, and family contexts to increase the risk of escalating antisocial behavior.

The "I don't care" theme represented a period when the participants' inside view was predominantly shaped by a deviant peer group. For most participants, this phase occurred approximately during the worst grades nine and ten when the discrepancy between the inside/outside views peaked. Personal attitudes and values were most closely aligned with problem peers who promoted and enhanced an egocentric, thrill seeking nature. An "I don't care" attitude, consistent with the peer group, permeated participants' interactions with adults in a variety of contexts. Because school was not a priority, it was characterized as "boring", "teachers didn't care", and "I have other options". Alcohol and drug abuse, chronic truancy, frequent altercations with school staff, school suspensions, criminal charges, and probation were common. The roots of anger varied by gender with the females exhibiting an intense defiance of authority, while the males' angry exterior either upheld a tough reputation or it covered hurt from peer rejection.

A prominent feature of participants' "out of control" inside view was the externalization of blame onto adults, parents, and/or teachers, who were regarded as incapable of understanding the adolescents' viewpoints. Blinding, loyal allegiance to aberrant peers fueled conflict at home, and detachment from parents erupted into feelings of rejection. Family ties disintegrated after continuing resistance to parents' frustrated attempts at controlling worsening behavior. For the males, this sense of not being liked extended to school.

Against a backdrop of conflict at home and indifference to school, the perception of peers as family fostered a sense of belonging. Conformity to the "cool" image of peers became a powerful magnet that sucked the adolescents deeper into trouble. Despite their shortcomings, peers were revered as gods who offered loyalty, support, and company. Participants overcame the initial queasiness about criminal activity and were recruited or caught up in escalating serious crime. Contact with older peers was also linked to early initiation to alcohol and drugs, especially for the females who obtained status by dating more mature males. For some, crime provided money to support escalating alcohol and drug abuse.

Participants' inside view seemed to dangerously narrow during this phase and it was impenetrable by the outside view of parents, teachers, and other professionals. Attempts to help the adolescents were met with defiance, indifference, and retaliation, even though the adolescents felt themselves falling further and further behind at school. Concerned adults seemed at a loss to control the antisocial behavior and significant life changing events or incidents were needed to initiate change.

Making distinctions between past and present behavior signaled a conversion in how participants were viewing themselves. The focus of the third theme involved a gradual distancing from disappointing previous experiences that was paired with striving for a better life. In the space of a year, participants had begun to make dramatic shifts during an approximate age range of 16 to 18. Participants' reflective process was evident in their interview language: "I never thought of that before", "I talk about it now and it sounds so stupid", and "I just wish I could turn back time". The inside view began to broaden as participants' reflections made them more aware of the wisdom of the outside view that they had previously worked so hard to discount.

The participants' on-going, healing transformation was most prevalent in the optimistic beliefs of hope and anticipation for a more useful future. The three participants who expressed the deepest insights about their lives also experienced critical turning points, "hitting rock bottom", that jolted them into finding the right path. The confinement of prison provided a grim vision of a future devoid of meaning. Regret, shame, and disappointment were expressed about experiences that were not long ago characterized as thrilling and exciting. A sense of urgency and wasted time was surfacing as participants appraised the painful devastation of antisocial exploits, and their new focus on the future craved meaning and purpose.

Behavior changes were starting to follow participants' shifting perspectives. Coping by finding a better balance between fun and friends created encouraging signs at school. Improved attendance, attitude, and grades were resulting from an acknowledgement that school was the key to a successful future. Experimenting with new friends was contributing to finding options to the antisocial lifestyle. As the inside view became more accommodating of adult opinion, participants became receptive to interventions from parents, teachers, and helping professionals. In turn, participants' recommendations to adults helping troubled teenagers drew on personal experiences, and the central message was a need for compassion, patience, understanding, and flexibility.

Sobering Reality of Change

The optimism and hope expressed by these eight young people left the researcher feeling buoyed at the end of each interview, and he looked forward to the third meeting with participants to validate interpretations. The prospect of hearing remarkable updates about school progress and healing family relationships six months later met the sobering reality of participants' situations that had not varied greatly. In this section, two participants' updates are discussed in more detail to further illuminate the faltering journey of these adolescents' search for a better life. Jason and Crystal were selected because the third meeting took place about a year after the in-depth research interview while the remaining participants were met about five to six months later.

Jason, age 18, appeared the most mature and insightful of all the participants and the researcher expected him to make the most gains. In reality, a year later he had returned to school but dropped out after two months because of the need to work full-time. Although he expressed satisfaction about the school and teachers, moving out on his own and purchasing a car created financial constraints that took priority over staying in school. Jason was not confident about being able to return to school, and he seemed less optimistic about school compared to a year ago. Trying to get on with his life as best he could, Jason had certainly been successful in not "being that way again".

Eighteen-year-old Crystal had elected to live on her own after two unsuccessful attempts the past year to live in her parents' home that resulted in continued familial conflict. During the past year, Crystal had been living with friends, working part-time, and taking correspondence high school courses with plans of attending a local college in an arts program in the fall. She described a two-month relapse of drinking and frequenting bars but her probation had ended and she had remained out of the court system. Optimism was still expressed about fulfilling her dream of returning to full-time school.

The accounts of Jason and Crystal highlighted difficulties in re-establishing constructive ties at home and school after the years of turbulent behavior. Over half of the participants, five of eight adolescents, were living independently away from parents, and not one adolescent reported receiving supportive help through counselling. The continuing school instability was evident for the remaining six participants with five of them leaving school and only one maintaining correspondence courses. Four participants expressed hope of returning to school the following September. One participant, who was unavailable for a third meeting, had dropped out of school and had not responded to written correspondence.

Despite noble intentions, the participants' were struggling to regain a stable foothold. The encouraging news was that the youth still held the desire to obtain further education, all reported avoidance of renewed criminal activity and justice system involvement, and attempts were made to reside with parents for those who had left home. In light of the difficult transition these teenagers were making, their achievements should perhaps be viewed as significant accomplishments as they were making their way with minimal family support.

The interviews provided a privileged glimpse into the interior worlds of eight adolescents who were under going significant life transformations following a period of extreme emotional and behavioral instability. The interview dialogue opened a reflective space for participants to consider the painful implications of wasted time and to express slowly emerging future dreams. Recognition of the importance of education as the key to a brighter future was enabling these adolescents to increasingly consider the merits of staying in school. The essence of the changing inside view was expressed in the substantive life lesson learned by Andrea who advised other teenagers " to not take your life for granted. It's so easy to just waste it and you think you're not wasting it because you're having too much fun".

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to illuminate the antisocial adolescent perspective of school experiences, mainly junior and senior high school, but participants expanded their stories to include family and community contexts. The focus was on youth exhibiting adolescent-onset antisocial behavior of mild to moderate severity. Although later-onset antisocial behavior is not well understood, it is responsible for a larger degree of the more serious behavior problems in schools. The invitation to participants, through semi-structured interviews, to share personal experiences in their own words and structure revealed a chaotic downward spiral into antisocial behavior that wreaked havoc in every aspect of life. Gradually, a liberating vision for the future accompanied by a search for new purpose began urging the adolescents in a new direction.

The themes from the analysis were examined against existing theoretical frameworks and research to consider the degree of similarity and thus provide support for the researcher's interpretation of the phenomenon under study. The connections between the study and existing literature were reviewed and highlighted, and implications for intervention, further research, and the study's limitations are discussed. The chapter concludes with the researcher's experience of the research process.

The Phenomenon Revealed

The study was undertaken within the framework of a phenomenological approach to capture the experiences of troubled adolescents in order to uncover common structures of experience. In van Manen's (1990) discussion of phenomenological research efforts into the structure of human experience, four fundamental existentials or themes were proposed that pervade the experience of all humans: lived space (spatiality), lived time (temporality), lived other (relationality), lived body (corporeality). These four fundamental themes can be differentiated but not separated. The ability to temporarily differentiate these four categories in this study suggests the underlying structures of the phenomenon were revealed.

Lived space (spatiality) represents felt space, "we become the space we are in" (van Manen, 1990, p. 102). The participants' stories reflected an uprooted, disconnected spatial dimension that corresponded to their disrupted lives. There was no clear physical space that emerged as a comfortable or secure home, because school and home settings were experienced as restrictive and oppressive. Emotional space was apparent as participants sought distance from adults and aligned more closely with peers during the antisocial phase and eventually, distance from antisocial peers provided space for reflection and change.

Lived time (temporality) was clearly reflected in the participants' reinterpretation of their lives from the reciprocal interactions between the past, present, and future. Present regrets and embarrassment of past experiences were shaping future hopes and expectations. In turn, the grasp of a more meaningful future created a present urge for change and a critical examination of the past. Time, once blurred by immediate gratification, was now recognized as a more valuable aspect of rebuilding a life.

Lived other (relationality) was apparent in the changing interactions with others as participants searched for a sense of support and security. The antisocial peer context, once the main supplier of meaning and identity, was making way for connections to other peers and adults that enhanced the search for a purposeful meaning in life. Externalization of blame was shifting to a more realistic view of personal contributions to time wasted.

Lived body (corporeality) was expressed through participants' self-perceptions, emotions, and physical reactions. Relations with troubled peers provided a self-identity of omniscience, omnipotence, and indestructibility that was being replaced with feelings of fragility and uncertainty. The bodily reactions from anger and defiance were now succumbing to a calmer state of being.

The fibers of distance, connection, and meaning were interwoven among the above four fundamental themes of experience. The devastating after effects of the antisocial lifestyle left participants searching for personal meaning in their experience, that according to Frankl (1959) is the most basic human drive.

Interview Process

Another valid test of the interview technique was to ask participants about their experiences of the interview process. When posed this question after the second and third meetings, participants responded favorably. Immediate feedback received from participants after the second interview included appreciation of a non-judgmental individual demonstrating curiosity about their stories. Participants also hoped their experiences would benefit others through the dissemination of information from this research project. More striking were the responses six to twelve months later when participants were requested to reflect back on the interview process during the third meeting. The comments from two female participants are noted to highlight these participants' positive reflections. Crystal noted that the interview provided an opportunity to reflect on her negative school experiences, and she was surprised at her identification by the school counsellor as a potential research participant because she felt her "life was not that messed up". Mary reflected how reading the written summary of her experience had made her "think of how bad I really was". It was evident both young women possessed an ideal view of self that became alarmed about the severity of antisocial behavior described from an outsider's interpretation. The interview seemed to aid in the connection of the inner and outer worlds and highlighted the importance of moving from the experiencing to the awareness through the telling.

Integration with the Literature

Through personal interviews, the researcher attempted to gain access to the inside view of antisocial adolescent's experiences at school, but the participants' narratives also encompassed their family and community contexts. No hypotheses were tested and no specific theoretical positions were challenged, yet it is imperative to note that similarities and differences were noted between the descriptions of the phenomenon under study and the literature. The major findings of the study, taken from an antisocial adolescent perspective, revealed interesting descriptions regarding the:

- contrast between conventional classification systems of antisocial behavior and the inside perspective.
- aspects of the school setting that contributed to the development and possible maintenance of antisocial behavior.
- role of peers in socializing the adolescents into an antisocial lifestyle
- gender differences in the development and expression of antisocial behavior
- family-of-origin concerns that were present before, during, and after the participants' antisocial life phase

- adolescents' disenchantment with an antisocial lifestyle and the gradual process of leaving behind a destructive lifestyle

Participants' generated an inside view that was contextualized within multiple reciprocal interactions with individuals at home, school, and the community. The framework of the participants' experiences that connected their inner and outer worlds reflected processes similar to the ecological model proposed by Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994). The proximal processes of peer-parent, peer-teacher, or peer-peer relationships seemed to play a primary role in the descriptions of the phenomenon. The diversity of effects was apparent as the interactions either produced positive or negative outcomes. The importance of considering factors rather than processes was reinforced that can help explain the role of peers, temperament, family, and the school. It also provided a window into the participants' process of initiating a shift towards a more productive life.

Disparate Views

The diagnostic definition of conduct disorder (DSM-IV, 1994) and participant quotations shown below, reflect contrasting inside and outside views of adolescent antisocial behavior. While the interviews enabled participants' to shift to a more outside perspective, the researcher experienced an opposite effect. I was shifted from the external disorder perspective of adolescent conduct disorder to an inside, personal, and meaningful perspective of the motives and emotion underlying the adolescents' observed antisocial behavior (See Table 6-1).

The initial DSM-IV (1994) conduct disorder criteria served to identify troubled youth for this study, but the curious, non-judgmental environment of the interviews allowed the expression of meaningful experiences to emerge. The conduct disorder definition reflected an outside perception of deviant adolescent behavior that is void of the meaning bound in each participant's experience. I felt the participants' statements above moved beyond an external behavioral description to capture the core of each of these individual's struggles. All the participants were interviewed at various stages of reclaiming their lives from a devastating foray into an antisocial lifestyle. Although histories smoldered with

Table 6-1 Outside vs. Inside View

Outside View

Conduct Disorder Diagnostic Criteria (DSM-IV, 1994)

A repetitive and persistent pattern of behavior in which the basic rights of others or major age-appropriate societal norms or rules are violated, as manifested by the presence of three (or more) of the following criteria in the past 12 months, with at least one criterion present in the past 6 months.

bullying, intimidating, or threatening others
initiating physical fights
using a weapon that can cause serious physical harm
physical cruelty to animals
physical cruelty to people
stealing while confronting a victim
forcing someone into sexual activity
deliberate fire setting with the intent of causing serious damage
deliberate destruction of others' property
breaking and entering
often lying to obtain goods or favours or to avoid obligations
stealing without confronting victim
often staying out late at night despite parental prohibitions beginning before age 13
running away from home overnight at least twice while living in parental home
often truant from school beginning before age 13

Inside view

Crystal	*"I had to hit rock bottom"*
Andrea	*"I didn't want to sit and rot in jail"*
Mary	*"No time for myself"*
Jason	*"I never want to be that way again"*
Cameron	*"I was the one that didn't fit in"*
Shane	*"I just wish I could turn back time"*
Earl	*"People would just laugh at me instead of laugh with me"*
Linda	*"I don't belong in high school"*

anger and retaliation, participants' current shift to the future radiated with hope, optimism, and a longing for a better life. The potential for rebuilding their lives underlies the remainder of the discussion chapter.

The contrast between the DSM-IV criteria and the participants' reality illustrated the strengths and limitations of the classification system. Benefits of clinical diagnosis include accurate descriptions and associated features that are necessary in making correct differential diagnoses of conduct disorder (Rapoport & Ismond, 1996) to facilitate the implementation of appropriate interventions. Comorbidity of other disorders with conduct disorders are common (Carter, 1998; Offord et al., 1992; Mandel, 1997), and the following five comorbid conditions are typically associated with conduct disorder: attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), substance abuse, depression, anxiety, and academic underachievement. Identification of comorbid disorders is important because they can affect the manifestation, course, and treatment of conduct disorders (Frick, 1998).

The effects of comorbid disorders were evident in this study because participants, their parent(s) or guardian, and the school reported diagnosed psychiatric disorders that may have contributed to the onset and maintenance of antisocial behavior. Impulsiveness and hyperactivity related to ADHD interacted with thrill seeking behavior and peers to escalate behavior problems. Depression and anxiety, reported by two of the females, was tied to dysfunctional family processes. Learning problems, reported by three males, were evident in elementary school and contributed to increased frustration from grade seven onward. More importantly, intervention from schools, community agencies, medical professionals, psychologists, and the justice system had positively contributed to controlling symptoms. Psychological assessment, special education school programs, use of medication, individual or family counselling, residential group homes, alternative school programs, in and outpatient hospital programs, and incarceration were interventions reported by participants that provided some level of support.

Temperament traits were described by the adolescents, such as stubbornness or insecurity, and these dispositional characteristics may or may not have combined with family, peer, and school contexts in the development of antisocial behavior. Current consensus in the literature upholds that genetic factors in part influence antisocial behavior (Neiderhiser et al., 1996; Carey & Goldman, 1997). It was possible that genetic and environmental conditions interacted in the development and maintenance of participants' behavior problems.

The diagnostic utility of classifying antisocial behavior may pose limitations in our understanding the complex interactive processes that lead to and sustain serious behavior problems. Despite the common themes represented from the eight interviews, participants revealed a diversity of experiences that are difficult to capture under a single diagnostic heading such as "conduct disorder: adolescent-onset type". Although diagnosis represents a necessary first step in identifying problems and appropriate interventions, treatment that recognizes the ecological approach to human development where individuals construct their meaning within social contexts (Anderson, 1997; Mahoney, 1991; White & Epston, 1990), is more efficacious in addressing the multiplicity of problems associated with antisocial behavior.

The School Setting

According to participants, the transition to junior high school represented the period when antisocial behavior worsened as stronger connections formed with troubled peers. The onset of behavior problems in approximately grade six or seven and the peak period during grades nine to eleven, corresponded to the approximate chronological ages of thirteen to seventeen. This marked increase of maladaptive behaviors in early adolescence and gradual decline in late adolescence, possibly due to maturation and the diminished attraction of deviant peers, was well-documented (Dishion & Patterson, 1997; Moffitt et al., 1996). Participants claimed the formation of new peer networks in junior high contributed to the onset of problem behaviors; this description corresponded to current conceptualizations of the role of peers in adolescent-onset antisocial behavior (Frick, 1998; Moffitt, 1993). The role of peers at school in providing increased emotional support during early adolescence was found in a sample of Edmonton grade seven students (Kurita & Janzen, 1996). If positive help from friends in coping with problems predicted successful group integration and personal intimacy for normal developing adolescents, it may be reasonable to assume connection with maladjusted peers may lead to maladaptive responses.

It is possible the junior high school environment influenced the behavior problem onset. Participants' negative psychological changes may have partly resulted from a mismatch between their developmental needs and opportunities afforded in the social environment of the school. A negative, regressive environmental change is created in junior high school by an increase in ability grouping, comparative and public evaluation, whole-class task organization, and decreased participation in rule making (Eccles et al., 1993). The transition stress of junior high school was illustrated by an American longitudinal study of eighth graders that found students who did not make a transition until at least grade nine had fewer problems in grade eight (Anderman & Kimweli, 1997). School organization characteristics, such as grade seven to nine schools, provide meeting places for early to middle adolescents, and it may be the current structure of grade seven to nine in Alberta junior high schools is not entirely compatible with the developmental needs of early adolescents.

The participants' pervasive "I don't care" attitude created a destructive cycle at school that involved arguing and fighting, alcohol and drug abuse, truancy, underachievement, class and school suspensions, expulsions, and school transfers. An omniscient and omnipotent mindset externalized blame onto school staff, simultaneously creating ignorance of personal behaviors and attitudes that were offensive to others. The result, a distorted view of self unjustly treated by school staff, led to perceptions that teachers and principals were uncaring, unfair, and unconcerned. Participants' indicated their blindness to the concerned efforts of school personnel was limited to the peak period of antisocial behavior. Their self-perceptions match individual characteristics found in the literature regarding students with behavior problems (Cole, 1995; Olweus, 1994): poor impulse control, over perceiving hostility in others, habitually blaming others for wrong doings, a strong need to dominate others, little empathy, an aggressive reaction pattern, and substance abuse.

From the ecological perspective, interactions are bi-directional within any setting. At school, the teacher influences the structure of activities that impact students, but students' reactions, in turn, impact the setting (Shaftel & Fine, 1997). The reciprocal nature of interactions within the school was evident in participants' interactions with school personnel. The participants' disappointment in how they were treated by teachers and principals seemed to highlight the limitations of the schools ability to deal with antisocial behavior. Discussion here will be limited to the role of teachers since participants' concerns focused most on teachers.

The adolescents' comments about uncaring teachers raised the question of how adult expectations, tolerances, and perceptions influenced relationships with difficult students. Participants' felt misunderstood, treated harshly, and not provided second chances. The decreased personal and positive relationships with teachers after the transition to junior high school is especially problematic in early adolescence when children require close relationships with adults outside the home (Eccles et al., 1993). Overly strict, inflexible classroom management practices that provide few opportunities for student input clash with defiant adolescents. Ineffective school administrators, inconsistent disciplinary practices, oppressive school rules, inadequate counselling, staff biases, and irrelevant curriculum contribute to school violence (Gorski & Pilotto, 1993). In addition, antisocial adolescents who are not committed to schools become increasingly disenfranchised from conventional institutions and vulnerable to multiple problems of living (Cairns et al., 1997). Unfortunately, accumulated negative behavior worked against participants, and they became victims of their behavior as they found themselves increasingly distanced from helping sources.

Participants overwhelmingly described teacher qualities that made the classroom environment more accepting but these inviting characteristics were perceived as lacking when needed most. Effective teacher characteristics included a proactive rather reactive approach, fair firmness, compassion, and an engaging, interesting teaching style (Hill and Hill, 1994; Noguera, 1995), and these qualities were all reflected in the teenagers' descriptions of favorite teachers who had made a positive difference.

The school experiences related by participants seemed to reflect a collision between the transition to junior high, the formation of new peer networks, individual risk characteristics, possible detrimental school limitations, and adolescent developmental stages. Schools face difficult challenges in accommodating troubled youth and an important consideration is the problem does not reside solely within the individual, but also exists within the interaction of the student within the school environment (Shaftel & Fine, 1997). This perspective offers greater opportunities for more effective interventions at the school level.

Antisocial Pathways

Antisocial behavior in this study crossed all socio-economic levels from a single parent on welfare in a small rented apartment to a couple residing in a beautiful home in an upscale residential area. Histories obtained from parents or guardians, school counsellors, and participants, indicated that serious antisocial behavior was not present prior to age eleven for any of the participants. The onset, escalation, and eventual de-escalation of antisocial behavior represented a compressed time period of about five to six years when participants' lives were turned upside down. The destructive path of developing an antisocial lifestyle came at a personal cost as the adolescents reported rejection from home and school. A marginalized existence led to conflict and detachment from families, temporarily giving up on school, hostile relations with school staff, alcohol and substance abuse, entry into crime, refusal of help from concerned adults, and a belief of infallibility. The costs to society were incurred by the mental health, medical, education, and justice systems that attempted to intervene. Although these youth did not display frequent, violent acts against others, their behavior and attitude otherwise seemed indistinguishable from adolescents showing childhood-onset conduct disorder. These similarities of the early versus late onset severe behavior patterns during adolescence were noted by Moffitt et al. (1996). This section contrasts the antisocial lifestyle of the participants with current research on this population.

Similarities were present between participants' experience of antisocial behavior and existing models of delinquent behavior (Kazdin, 1995; Tolan & Loeber, 1993). Several characteristics of the "adolescent-onset" model (Dishion & Patterson, 1997; Lahey & Loeber, 1994; Moffitt, 1993) were evident in this study, and features of the female participants' antisocial behavior corresponded with the "delayed-onset trajectory" of female conduct disorder (Silverthorn & Frick, in press). The results from the thematic analysis of participants' experiences will be used here to deepen our understanding of current conceptualizations of developmental pathways in antisocial behavior.

The role of peers in the entry, maintenance, and relapse of antisocial behavior was a striking aspect of participants' stories, and the school provided a context for developing deviant peer networks. The prominent role of peer influence in adolescent antisocial behavior is firmly established (Henggeler, 1989; Moffitt, 1993; Patterson et al.,1992). It seemed that within the short span of one or two years, a destructive attitude and behavior transplant occurred where deviant peer norms ruled supreme. No simple reasons for the negative transformation emerged; rather a complex combination of several situations created undesirable outcomes. Participants mentioned the effects of emotional disconnection from home, entering junior high school, loneliness, trying to fit in, influence of peers, alcohol and drugs, and finding acceptance from peers.

Participants' meaningful relationships with troubled peers corresponded to the literature. Deviant adolescents become members of social groups and establish close friendships that are no less meaningful than those of non-deviant teenagers (Cairns et al.,1988; Cairns et al.,1997; Dishion et al., 1996; Manaster, 1989). The participants' unwavering loyalty and blind allegiance to a deviant set of peers seemed an exaggeration of the normal increased conformity to peers during early to mid-adolescence (Steinberg, 1989). In the case of these teenagers, the immediate gratification of the peer group completely overpowered any stable, external influence. Peers seemed to act as a "flattering mirror" to boost self-esteem resulting in overstating positive characteristics of the group and in being overly negative of others (Mitchell, 1996). This mutually advantageous interaction corresponded to Mitchell's (1992) concept of "reciprocal rationalization" that leads adolescents to obtain the companionship of peers who perceive their limitations or failures in a favorable light.

Participants referred to a sense of belonging that was derived from the peer family. The adolescents' discovery of connectedness with troubled teens mirrored the experience of street kids who feel betrayed by significant adults in their lives (Webber, 1991). Participants maintained continuing ties with deviant peers despite school changes, which Cairns et al. (1997) reported as the reconstitution of antisocial affiliations. Participants' tendency to acknowledge positive qualities of antisocial peers, even after these friendships had started to dissolve, accentuated the depth of attachment and indebtedness to the peer group.

Both male and female participants' accounts of peer persuasion paralleled the model of "adolescent-limited" antisocial behavior (Dishion & Patterson, 1997; Moffitt, 1993; Moffitt et al., 1996). Moffitt's view of delinquency as a "group social phenomenon" and his three conditions to account for etiology, "motivation" from obtaining a mature status and accompanying power and privilege, social "mimicry" of the antisocial behavior of life-course-persistent youths, and "reinforcement" of delinquency by its negative consequences, were present in participants' experiences. The socialization process of the peer group was evident because participants recounted how they gradually adopted the negative attitudes and behaviors of their peers. Motivation was in the form of attraction and conformity to antisocial norms related to the image of older peers, some of whom smoked, consumed alcohol, used drugs, or committed crime. Mimicry of peers' attitudes and behavior fostered defiance, anger, truancy, alcohol and drug abuse, and entry into crime. The initial phase of fear and eventual habituation to criminal activities agreed with Moffitt's notion of the recruitment tactics of more experienced antisocial youth. Reinforcement was often described in terms of the thrill and excitement of the moment and as a declaration of independence. Moffitt's model seemed to more closely fit the experience of the male participants in this study because there was consistency in the characteristics of less aggression, lack of psychopathology, desire for interpersonal closeness, shunning authority, and closer family attachments at age 18 (Moffitt et al., 1996).

Alcohol and drug use was disclosed by all participants, with seven adolescents reporting alcohol and substance abuse, the most prevalent substance being marijuana. Use and abuse problems were connected to wide spread problems: home and school truancy, underachievement at school, and delinquency. There is a relationship between peers, alcohol and drug use, and delinquency (Thornberry & Krohn, 1997), and evidence suggests that progression in one category of behavior such as substance use, is associated with increased likelihood of persistence in other categories of behavior (Loeber, 1988). Association with peers provided an introduction to alcohol and drugs that rapidly expanded into frequent intoxication. Participants' criminal activities were often related to intoxication and for some, crime provided income to support alcohol and substance use. Crime reported by participants was generally against property such as theft rather than direct crime against persons and may have been part of the thrill cycle or social pressure for conformity to older peers. The criminal activity described by participants related to a finding that adolescents of middle and upper socio-economic status were more likely to engage in "soft core" offences to get parental attention or to relieve boredom by following the lead of the peer group (Calhoun, Jurgens, & Fengling, 1993).

The heightened egocentrism and selfishness of participants in their antisocial life phase seemed to represent a fatalistic narrowing of perspective. Mitchell's (1996) description of the adolescent "narcissistic attitude" seemed to aptly fit participants' excessive demands, lack of empathy, decreased moral standards, and diminished capacity for objective thought. Participants' impaired reasoning abilities resembled the "murky and beclouded" adolescent thinking described by Mitchell (1996) that occurs when reasoning regresses to a more concrete level and focuses on "me" rather than the issue at hand. Given the participants' powerful connection to troubled peers, it is reasonable to assume their thought patterns were negatively affected by social interactions with other "murky" thinkers.

Gender Contrasts

Gender differences were apparent in the formation of peer networks, origin and expression of anger, influence of older peers, and the severity of antisocial behavior. The male participants' profound sense of isolation upon entering grade seven resulted from an inability to develop new friendships and from peer rejection. Their junior high school experience of isolation, peer rejection, anger, retaliation, and eventual affiliation with deviant peers paralleled the patterns of childhood peer rejection in middle childhood that predicted behavior disorders in early adolescence (Coie et al., 1992; Kupersmidt et al, 1990; Parker & Asher, 1987). Influence from deviant peers did not occur until grade nine when membership with a peer group was established. The males framed peer affiliation as feeling accepted by loyal peers as opposed to the need for developing closer emotional ties. The male pattern of antisocial behavior occurred more outside the school context because of chronic truancy patterns and less familial discord was described.

The girls' chaotic transition corresponded to Pipher's (1994) description of female vulnerability during early adolescence as the self moves from thinking "Who am I?" to "What must I do to please others?" The pain females experience at this developmental point manifests itself as depression from self-blame or as anger when pain that is blamed on others is often mislabelled as rebellion or delinquency.

The female participants reported establishing peer networks in grade seven that mushroomed into connection with negative influential peers as time progressed. The females were affiliated with a clique of female or mixed gender peers who were also part of a larger network of both stable and deviant peers. The female participants' value of close connections with friends corresponded with evidence that women forge stronger and more intimate bonds with friends than males in virtually every life phase and that, delinquent females are embedded in friendship networks that encouraged delinquent behavior (Craig & Peplar, 1997; Giordana & Cernkovich, 1997).

Contact with older males through peer friendships and dating, produced early exposure to alcohol, drugs, and criminal activity that matched the finding earlier female maturation in combination with older antisocial male peers produces disastrous behavioral consequences (Caspi et al., 1993). Obtaining status through affiliation with older males was another reason given for the attraction of older peer connections, which corresponds with the lack of power girls sense in early adolescence (Pipher, 1994).

For example, Andrea who was age 13 or 14, associated with peers four to five years older than herself. Her life quickly spun out of control with a corresponding increase of alcohol and drug abuse, school truancy, defiant attitude, and initiation into crime. It is not hard to imagine that a younger impulsive, vulnerable female was susceptible to the urgings of older, seasoned peers to join the antisocial bandwagon. In combination with strong societal sanctions against female misbehavior that weaken during adolescence and allow for expression of antisocial behavior different from males (Giordana & Cernkovich, 1997; Kavanagh & Hops, 1994), the storm of female antisocial behavior intensified. Two of the female participants experienced abuse; one witnessed spousal abuse and the other was sexually assaulted. There is a substantial body of literature relating abuse experiences to causes of antisocial behavior (Widom, 1997).

The evidence that antisocial girls may have higher rates of ADHD than boys (Zoccolillo, 1993), was apparent in this study as two female participants were diagnosed with ADHD. The females, more than the males, seemed to describe an impulsive, careless decision making style that pulled them deeper into trouble. It may be the negative socialization influence of older peers combined with participants' impulsive tendencies to elevate risk-taking behavior. Female antisocial behavior in this study escalated more quickly and became more severe than the males as evidenced by the involvement in the court system of three female participants. As well, the females' account of a potent and explosive defiant attitude that strongly despised authority figures such as parents, teachers, and principals, matched the severe levels of antisocial behavior in female adolescents reported in the literature (Cairns et al., 1988; Frick, 1998; Mandel, 1997).

The intense and more severe antisocial experience of the female participants appeared similar to the "delayed-onset trajectory" proposed by Silverthorn and Frick (in press) to explain the development of conduct disorder in girls. The similarities were evident in the higher level of family dysfunction described by the girls and in the temporary callous-unemotional features displayed during the peak phase of antisocial behavior. Unlike Silverthorn and Frick's model, the female participants did not exhibit high rates of neuropsychological and cognitive dysfunction. Despite the similarities discussed above, it is unclear whether the females' behavior in this study was more characteristic of the delayed-onset pattern of female conduct disorder or an adolescent-onset typology. Sampling may account for some differences because the delayed-onset model utilized incarcerated juvenile delinquents with severe antisocial behavior while this research accessed adolescents in the public school system exhibiting mild to moderate symptoms of conduct disorder.

Family Influences

Moffitt's (1993) model of adolescent-onset antisocial behavior proposed that adverse family backgrounds do not hamper teenagers' development and that the peer group is the main culprit for the development of antisocial behavior. A substantial body of evidence from research on childhood-onset conduct disorder shows a strong connection between parental adjustment, parenting practices, and the development of antisocial behavior (Dishion & Patterson, 1997; Frick, 1994; Kazdin, 1995; Patterson et al., 1992; Straus, 1995). The effect of family functioning on the later-onset of antisocial behavior has been the subject of little research. Participants' portrayal of their families differed from Moffitt's proposal of the reduced impact of the family and corresponded closely to the existing literature about family life and behavior problems. The female participants described higher levels of family discord corresponding to the socialization effects of girls' stronger familial bonds (Giordana & Cernkovich, 1997). The girls revealed fiercer conflict with parents, open revolt against parental consequences, and more intense feelings of detachment from family.

Family-of-origin issues prior to antisocial behavior, intense conflict with parents during onset of antisocial behavior, and physical and emotional detachment from families were prevalent for all participants. From the teenagers' perspective, conflict at home translated into rejection, estrangement, or detachment from the family that lingered even after the desistance of behavior problems. The intense disharmony at home most likely interacted with the security that participants' found in a supportive peer group. Although adverse family situations were not present, such as current conflictual divorce proceedings or active domestic violence, these findings suggest that family functioning was an important catalyst in the adolescents' harmful adhesion to deviant peers.

Frick's (1998) summary of the family function correlates to conduct disorders closely corresponded to the participants' family experiences. Parental psychopathology, the marital relationship, and parenting practices were identified as most important in understanding and treating conduct disorder. The last two domains of family dysfunction were more prevalent in participants' depiction of their families. Divorce and the addition of a second adult to the household became an issue for female participants', even though the family recompositions occurred prior to onset of behavior problems. Anger and resentment about losing a closer relationship with their mother spilled over into conflictual relationships with both adults in the home, similar to the finding that an addition of a second adult to the household does not necessarily improve children's functioning. Although there is some evidence that boys may benefit more from the addition of a step-father (Amato & Keith, 1991).

Participants despised overly harsh and rigid parental discipline methods, and there seemed to be an inverse relationship between the level of parental involvement and level of supervision. The degree of parental involvement and supervision waned as antisocial behavior intensified, which corresponded to Dishion and Patterson's (1997) belief that parents find relief from difficult to supervise youth by stepping aside to permit more unsupervised wandering. The participants' perception of a disrupted home environment and difficult parents resembled the significant correlation between ineffective parenting practices and children without callous-unemotional traits (Frick, 1998).

Interference with effective parenting practices from parental mental health problems was evident in four families that corresponded with the literature (Frick, 1998). Depression was linked to reduced supervision and monitoring. For three participants, a physically abusive father created resentment and distance in the parent-child relationship.

The family life cycle process of realigning the family relationship system to support the development of family members in a functional way (Carter & McGoldrick, 1989) was a useful means of viewing the ineffective family responses to stressors. Developmental stages created stressors that family's did not effectively adjust to: divorce, remarriage, common-law relationships, unresolved grief issues, adoption and identity issues, and adolescent demands for autonomy. The resulting family confusion and disruption pointed to the need for appropriate support for struggling parents who become increasingly frustrated and despondent in attempting to cope with an out of control adolescent. The aftermath of antisocial behavior left fractured relationships with parents, even after the participants' negative lifestyle abated. The scars of antisocial damage had created numerous barriers for re-establishing supportive connections with significant adults, and four participants were attempting to rebuild lives with minimal family support.

Exploring New Life Options

I found the most encouraging aspect of the participants' experience was the dramatic cognitive, affective, and behavioral shifts away from an antisocial lifestyle. The short-term rewards of antisocial behavior were increasingly viewed as detrimental punishments that interfered in building a stable future. The feelings of disbelief, shame, regret, loss, and unhappiness that shaded the adolescents' reflections of their antisocial past were vividly apparent in their language: "I was so stupid", "I regret what I did", and "I wish I could turn back time". Accompanying past stories of "wasted time", were the teenagers' proclamations, "I'm not like that anymore", as if to distance themselves further from a past, unpleasant existence. The striking contrast between the adolescents' shifting perceptions of the past, present, and future were partially accounted for by current developmental changes such as intellectual and emotional maturation. However, the transforming personal meaning went beyond the parameters of conventional research on developmental pathways.

Some aspects of Moffitt's (1993) adolescent-limited model, partially rooted in social learning theory, fit with participants' shifting perspectives, emotions, and behaviors. Desistance in antisocial behavior resulted from waning motivation and shifting contingencies as well as from receptivity to options for change. Moffitt (1993) contended that adolescent-limited offenders had more time to develop prosocial behaviors and basic academic skills that made them more eligible for further education, marriage, and a vocation. The participants' stories reflected a similar change in direction. There seemed to be a period of greater stability at home and school prior to the onset of problems. After a chaotic antisocial phase, participants began to weigh the heavy price of continued antisocial behavior against the future benefits of renewing a school commitment that produced a steering away from crime, using less alcohol or drugs, and reducing time spent with deviant peers. For the most part, the behavioral changes were subtle and included healthier options such as slowly improving school attendance and grades or reduced conflict with parents.

Participants' perceptions seemed to reflect a maturing cognitive pattern. Mitchell (1996) named relevant behavioral and attitudinal changes associated with the decline in adolescent egocentrism and the strengthening of objective reason and impartial analysis: decreasing demands of seeing things my way, perceiving adults as separate individuals with their own perspectives, and awareness that all people share important commonalties. The broadening perspectives of the participants corresponded to Selman's theory of perspective-taking (Santrock, 1996) when adolescents develop the ability to view a situation from a third person vantage and start to see social conventions are necessary because they are understood by others. A perspective shift invited participants to more critically ponder their own actions and to consider more credible adult opinions that were becoming more credible. Gradual disintegration of the armor plated antisocial exterior was creating a space for reflection and change.

Meaningful learning from experience was part of a powerful transformation for participants as the reflective process opened a greater need for purpose and reason, well documented in the literature (Colaizzi, 1978, Frankl, 1959, White & Epston, 1990). Mahoney (1991) captured the essence of participants' significant life shifts with his belief that all psychological change involves change in personal meanings where the individual becomes a moderator of all aspects of learning and development. Emotions seemed to play an important role in shaping participants' assumptions about the self and the world. Mahoney considered emotions to be "primitively powerful *knowing* processes that are integral to the life-span self-organization of the individual" (1991, p. 208). Participants' awareness and reaction to their feelings of regret and shame were important elements in the unfolding of their development. Generally, the female participants portrayed a deeper sense of renewal from the past turmoil leaving one to speculate whether their journey was more painful than the males.

The transformation for some participants resulted from critical turning points that created uncomfortable levels of distress and discomfort ameliorated by an awakening search for a more purposeful life. Some participants were unable to implement a life renewing direction until significant meaning shifts produced awareness as well as experiments in more adaptive ways of relating to others. These significant events were synonymous with Carter and McGoldrick's (1989) description of life turning points as punctuation marks in the life cycle that elicit changes in self-concept, sense of identity, and new social and emotional roles. Mandel (1997) stated that many vulnerability or protective processes concern turning points in peoples' lives, rather than long-standing attributes, that can change a developmental path for better or worse. There were protective factors (Shamsie & Hluchy, 1995) in this study that might have helped initiate a movement away from antisocial behavior: some contact with more stable peers, prior positive school experiences, no significant cognitive or academic deficits, and lack of severe family dysfunction.

Considering the significant changes that were underway, what impeded participants in moving on with their lives? This question arose from the third and final meeting with participants who described stabilization but not a significant amount of change, even for the two participants who had a year to implement change since our last meeting. The myriad of numerous obstacles cluttering the new path may have resulted from the accumulative negative effects of prolonged antisocial behavior. Moffitt (1993) described these roadblocks as "life ensnaring events". The greater the number of snares experienced by adolescents such as interrupted education, a drug habit, or incarceration, the more likely the adolescent will struggle in becoming disentangled from a deviant lifestyle. It seems that intervention at this point could be successful in helping these adolescents liberate themselves from the clutches of a destructive way of life.

The emerging vision that participants held for the future was a compelling reminder that many youths' potential is temporarily squashed by destructive choices and situations, some out of their control. The study reinforced the important nature of the adolescent perception, the inside view, which temporarily bonded to peers' antisocial values but later expanded to accommodate possibilities for positive change. The contrast of the inside and outside view presented here reinforced the need to incorporate both perspectives to create a complimentary view leading to development of a more comprehensive understanding of adolescent-onset antisocial behavior in the school, home, and community contexts.

Implications for Interventions

The illumination of the antisocial adolescent school experience offers important implications for intervention in terms of individual, school, family, and community based levels. While the researcher acknowledges the extensive findings related to successful identification and treatment of early-onset behavior problems and the variety of excellent early interventions programs available, the implications below were limited to addressing teenagers exhibiting adolescent-onset antisocial behavior. Three areas are discussed beginning with how the study findings widen our understanding and assessment of later-onset conduct disorder, school considerations in meeting the needs of troubled youth and their families, and broader treatment issues in addressing adolescent antisocial behavior.

Using the inside view

The inside perspective articulated by the eight participants in the study indicated important differences in how adolescents perceive themselves and others compared to diagnostic classifications of conduct disorder. This suggests it is important to acknowledge and use the inside view for accurate assessment and diagnosis as well as formulating effective interventions with families of teenagers with serious behavior problems. Despite the commonalties in participants' experiences, each individual's unique story revealed a complex interaction of characteristics and contexts that led to antisocial behavior and its eventual desistance.

The variety of problems faced by participants reinforced the important need for a clinical assessment to develop a clear case conceptualization, whether initial contact with the adolescent's problems was in a school system, community agency, mental health agency, hospital, or related medical service. Whomever is responsible for addressing the referral concern, appropriate assessment and diagnosis is significant given the heterogeneous nature of conduct disorder, the multiple pathways for development, and the high degree of comorbid problems such as oppositional defiant disorder, ADHD, depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and academic underachievement (Mandel, 1997). The relevant components of a clinical assessment are mentioned here with a detailed assessment process available in the literature (Frick, 1988; Goldstein et al., 1994; Kamphaus & Frick, 1996). An assessment should include numerous aspects of the adolescent's functioning and should provide a picture of the psychosocial environment so intervention occurs at the best time with the best approaches. Cognitive and academic achievement testing can identify learning difficulties requiring remediation as well as estimating the adolescent's capacity in language development and problem solving.

The egocentric perspective of the participants while in the antisocial phase emphasized the importance of using multiple informants for behavior rating scales to obtain a more accurate picture of the youth's functioning. At the same time, self-report measures and unstructured clinical interviews are a necessary assessment component to understand the adolescent's perceptions of self and others because these youth feel victimized and blame others. The examiner needs to adopt a friendly, supportive, and non-judgmental stance to facilitate rapport and communication. An effective interview leads to understanding and appreciation of the adolescent's worldview, and it can lend insight into the level of acculturation with deviant and/or stable peers, attitudes towards school and learning, relationships with family, personal interests and aspirations, alcohol or drug use, and the degree of cooperation available.

The high level of family discord reported by participants emphasized the need to examine the family context as part of a clinical assessment. The available behavior rating scales for assessing family functioning were not standardized on large representative samples and they do not focus on family dysfunction areas most related to conduct disorder (Frick, 1998). Until useful standardized measures are available, clinicians will need to rely on behavioral observations and unstructured interviews to determine the potential problem areas of parental involvement, negative parenting practices, monitoring and supervision, and discipline practices. Henggeler et al. (1998) provided five categories of family phenomena that are useful in assessing family functioning. These categories are: (1) family system interactions; (2) parenting styles and supporting beliefs and skills; (3) marital interactions:

(4) individual characteristics that affect parenting tasks; and (5) practical aspects of the family ecology such as housing. The family life cycle framework of Carter and McGoldrick, (1989) addresses family interactions and parenting styles. The interviewer can assess the family's ability to adjust to greater adolescent demands for autonomy, realignment in the family from divorce and/or remarriage, or other developmental family stressors. The influence of sex-role stereotypes, especially for females, should be considered since adolescent females often confuse identity with intimacy by defining themselves through relationships with others. Negative family patterns can be identified that may help push adolescents into dysfunctional peer relationships.

The entry, escalation, and eventual exit process of antisocial behavior depicted by participants suggested three possible intervention gateways. The study results suggested that early intervention would probably be most beneficial, either prior to onset or during the early phase of onset. Once an adolescent reaches an out of control phase, it is extremely difficult to intervene directly with the teenager in counselling at this point because everyone, except peers, are shut out. Intervention needs be directed at the systems supporting the youth such as the family and the school to help him/her cope and to keep the teenager from completing drowning. The most efficacious point for direct intervention with the adolescents seemed to be in the desistance phase as intellectual, emotional, and social maturation allows the teenagers to consider new options. Unfortunately, the destructive aftermath of an antisocial lifestyle left participants disowned by families, detached from school, and limited support elsewhere for these struggling young adults. Government funding, learning programs, and counselling services are required to accommodate older students who require another chance at school while having to financially support themselves.

Participants' shared sage advice for any professional who meets an angry adolescent in therapy. After feeling rejection and betrayal from school and family systems, these adolescents are searching for adults who project warmth and caring. A collaborative, respectful approach that avoids pathologizing and invites adolescents and their families to disentangle themselves from "problem-saturated stories" (White & Epston, 1990) will empower construction of meaningful, liberating options. In my own work as a psychologist, paying close attention to language invites discovery of the self, uncontaminated by symptoms, which allows for emergence of a personal view more accountable for choices made in relationship to the problem. A substantial body of literature supports this collaborative therapeutic approach (Anderson, 1997; deShazer, 1994; Freeman, Epston, & Lobovits, 1997; Freedman & Coombs, 1996).

Professionals are encouraged to use acceptance, empathy, and non-judgment with adolescents to enhance the therapeutic relationship. Search for qualities about the youth to respect and find ways to empathize with their situation. The therapist will be tested and success is accomplished through listening. Sincere and non-judging questions will encourage reflection and honesty. How do you feel about that? What do you mean? What does this positive development say about you? What prepared you to take this important step? What's the most important lesson you learned from that experience? What is the next smallest step you can take in this new direction? Rather than offering excessive advice or sympathy, use questions to help the adolescent consider different views. What can you control? What can you not control? What is your opinion, what are others' opinions? What are you aware of about yourself now that the bad temper blinded your family to? What are the positive qualities your new friends appreciate about you? Questioning about promising new developments can serve to document, witness, and perform meaning as they transpire (Freedman & Coombs, 1996).

Challenges for Schools

The education system bears a large burden in attempting to deal with students demonstrating serious, disruptive behavior problems. From my experience as a teacher and a school counsellor, I know firsthand that schools invest considerable emotional and financial resources in attempting to accommodate the needs of antisocial youth. With these noble efforts in mind, I will use the participants' experience to highlight aspects of the school setting where intervention may be helpful.

Based on participants' descriptions, school staff should be alert for specific behaviors beginning in grade seven. The study findings suggested markers common to both genders as well as gender specific behaviors. For both genders, decreased academic motivation, school truancy, and alcohol and drug use following a relatively trouble free elementary school experience are warning signs. Males may be at risk if they exhibit the above behaviors as well as social adjustment difficulties. Females who demonstrate the above behaviors plus a growing defiant/non-compliant attitude, association with older peers, and dating older males are at increased risk for early alcohol and drug initiation and antisocial behavior. While these markers are far from exhaustive, they may be useful when considered in combination with the adolescents' personal characteristics, family system, and social and academic adjustment to the junior high school environment.

Since the transition to Junior High significantly impacts the intellectual, social, and emotional development of early adolescents, what can be done to lessen the impact? Ideally, it may help to replace all separate grade seven to nine schools with kindergarten to grade eight or nine structures, but given the enormous infrastructure in place, this is a long-term and possibly unrealistic solution. In the meantime, there are ideas, some of these are currently in use, that may soften the transition to grade seven for adolescents vulnerable to developing antisocial behavior. Considerations for school boards, principals, teachers, and school counsellors are presented below.

Participants' disdain of perceived unfair treatment from school administrators raised the question of how individual schools are implementing "zero-tolerance" policies handed down from school boards. Boards and administrators are invited to consider whether school policies reflect zero-tolerance of students or zero-tolerance of behavior. Adopting a get-tough stance with school violence does not adequately address the issue. MacDonald (1998) advocated "zero avoidance" so students, parents, and school staff know that all disruptive behavior will be acted upon, victims will be supported, witnesses will be provided a sense of security, and offenders will be given help in finding appropriate, non-violent ways of dealing with conflict in their lives.

Because teachers are the main adult contact students have in school, principals need to hire and inservice staff who have a genuine concern for teaching "students" that takes precedent over teaching a "subject". On going inservice can help teachers in effective classroom management, conflict resolution skills, and crisis management. The challenge for teachers is meaningfully connecting with an adolescent who makes classroom life a virtual hell. The participants of this study provided concrete suggestions: make learning fun and interesting, use humour, compliment positive behavior, be fair, show interest in a students life outside school, ask if a student needs help with school or personal problems, and be conscious of your appearance. Without a doubt, there are many teachers who model these effective characteristics but all teachers need to determine whether their philosophy and attitude towards an antisocial student communicates understanding or rejection.

The study results suggested that intervention targets of school counsellors may differ depending on the grade and age of the student. Intervention at the earliest stage is preferable, and junior high counsellors are advised to elicit cooperation from parents, teachers, school administrators, and relevant community agencies to attempt to divert the student from an antisocial path. The window of opportunity for senior high counsellors may open when the student begins exploring healthier lifestyle options. At this stage, there may be limited family involvement as well as increased negative bias from school staff. The focus may center on helping the adolescent re-enter the school system, develop appropriate study skills, and formulate realistic school and vocational objectives. If unavailable in the school, individual and/or family therapy referrals should be initiated to build on emerging constructive attitudes.

Every school is encouraged to have on staff a qualified counsellor who can work directly with students and families, consult with staff, and forge working relationships with community based agencies to bring service and support to the school. Through contact with several high schools in this study, I met both effective and ineffective counsellors. The common qualities of observed counsellor excellence were a warm and enthusiastic demeanor, genuine concern for others, respect for students, solid rapport with students, easy accessibility, and dependability. These people returned phone calls. Marginalized individuals such as antisocial students need access to a safe, trusting person and competent school counsellors fulfill this role.

Other advantages of utilizing a school-based counsellor are the coordination of prevention and education programs that target conflict resolution, alcohol and drug use, teen pregnancy, and social skills. Contingency management strategies can be coordinated such as a consistent reward and consequence system and home-school note system. Where possible, the counsellor can facilitate community connections through presentations from other institutions such as the police. The effectiveness of treatment programs for antisocial youths that involves exposure to prosocial peers (Feldman, 1992), can be utilized in the school through a peer mediation model (Cunningham & Cunningham, 1998; Cunningham et al., 1998; Lane & McWhirter, 1993) coordinated by the counsellor. Listening, problem solving, and critical thinking are modeled and reinforced by peer mediators for other students. A less effective alternative for service delivery is to contract professionals from outside the school system.

Working Together

The last section addresses how schools and other service providers can collaborate since comprehensive treatment approaches are more effective than single processes in ameliorating antisocial behavior (Frick, 1998). The study findings reinforce the need for coordination of services with other involved agencies or institutions to reduce redundancy and increase consistency.

The multisystemic therapy (MST) approach (Henggeler & Borduin, 1990; Henggeler et al., 1998) has proven effective for adolescents, and it's flexibility allows individual tailoring to the child's need (Frick, 1998). Developed for treating chronic, serious delinquents, the MST philosophical framework and intervention methods are appropriate for less severe antisocial behavior because current services available in many school boards and communities can be utilized. The MST model fits the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) presented in the literature review and it helps families identify and priortize changes in aspects of the ecology that have the highest probability of outcomes. Representing an orientation to treatment rather than a particular technique, the flexible MST approach recognizes the impact of both social contexts (family, school, peers) and certain child characteristics in the development of conduct disorder. Based on a comprehensive assessment, interventions are designed that address contextual and individual elements that produce the antisocial behavior. Practitioners involved in the assessment and treatment of conduct disorder are advised to adopt Henggeler's (1998) philosophy to aid in developing interventions that target sequences of behavior within and between multiple systems that maintain the identified problem.

The components of MST may involve family, individual, peer, school, and community intervention. Family therapy addresses ineffective parenting styles that maintain the child's' problem behavior. Discipline strategies, rule setting, and effective rewards and punishments may need addressing. Child rearing knowledge, parental social support, psychiatric disorders, substance abuse, or neglectful and abusive parenting styles may be barriers to successful outcomes that require attention. Family transitions from divorce and remarriage may create inappropriate expectations about adaptation to divorce, unsuccessful role negotiation, and ineffective parenting practices. Family intervention can help clarify roles, foster effective parenting skills, facilitate the adjustment process for remarried families, and address parental distress. Parents may also need support in decreasing their child's association with deviant peers by better monitoring, increasing contact with the youths' peers and parents, implementing unpleasant consequences, and facilitating involvement in prosocial activities.

Individual adolescent characteristics may need addressing if problem behaviors continue to surface despite implementation of ecological and systemic intervention. Individual intervention may target the social-perspective taking skills, belief system, and motivational system. Cognitive behavioral skills training (Frick, 1998) targets deficient skills in social problem solving. In general, four classes of strategies are available (Henggeler et al., 1998): (1) modeling; (2) role-play exercises; (3) behavioral contingencies; and (4) self-monitoring and self-instruction. Training in problem solving combines the above four strategies to teach individuals to use a sequential and deliberate process of solving social interaction problems. Stimulant medication may improve behavioral inhibition that in turn increases responsiveness to counselling interventions. Peer intervention can be structured through involvement in school and community based programs (Straus, 1995) like youth organizations, organized sports, youth volunteer service opportunities, peer mentor programs, church based programs, and work training programs. Individualized substance abuse treatment should be present focussed and targeting well-defined problems with behavioral and ecological interventions.

School based intervention includes educational testing, social relationships skills, consultation with staff and family, and providing opportunities for prosocial peer group activities. The school counsellor or therapist delineates responsibilities for each involved party, develops a system for monitoring progress, provides feedback to all parties, and revises strategies as needed.

The success of MST is limited by the competence of clinicians implementing the approach, the availability of a trained individual to coordinate treatment, the level of cooperation of families in treatment, coordinating treatment between institutions, and the funding required to maintain appropriate services like psychological assessments. Despite these limitations, this approach provides the most flexible approach to treatment to avoid fragmented and inconsistent interventions. A useful framework for treating the complex and multi-faceted nature of adolescent antisocial behavior was addressed by Frick (1998) who advocated three critical features of efficacious interventions to help antisocial youth. It is important to: (1) appreciate and understand the basic nature of conduct disorder and the multiple causal processes involved; (2) adopt a flexible approach using a comprehensive and individualized case conceptualization to guide planning an integrated treatment approach; and (3) utilize a multimodal approach including professionals and community agencies pooled in an integrated fashion using proven treatment approaches. Helping adolescents escape an antisocial lifestyle is a momentous task requiring a coordinated effort for all involved. The cost of fragmented, mediocre interventions far exceeds the expense of employing more comprehensive, successful intervention strategies.

Implications for Research

The present study offered insights into the adolescent perspective via the interview process. It is informative to examine the limitations of the study to determine future directions for research.

Limitations

There are three limitations to this study that may have affected the interviews and resulting interpretations. First, personal characteristics of the participants need to be considered. The participants' 15 to18 age span represented a difference in maturation levels and abilities in reflection and expression of personal accounts. For these reasons, junior high students were excluded from the study as well as adolescents with limited language abilities to ensure participants could provide an appropriate rendering of their experience. Ethnicity was restricted to Caucasian teenagers with the exception of one male participant of First Nation ancestry. Therefore, possible mediating influences of socialization processes within different cultures were not illuminated. School counsellors were relied upon to identify potential candidates and their ability to do so was influenced by their reputation and rapport with the student. Interviews with counsellors and parents helped ensure participants' behavior matched the selected criteria but students identified by the school were all demonstrating improved behaviors with a past history of antisocial symptoms.

Second, parents and peers were excluded from the study, other than the parents providing informed consent and relevant background information. The significant role of family functioning and peer relationships in the etiology of adolescent antisocial behavior is well-documented (Dishion & Patterson, 1997; Moffitt, 1993; Silverthorn & Frick, in press). Although other perspectives would have no doubt added richness to the data, the time constraints of the dissertation research limited the study to the adolescent participants. Consideration was given to age, maturity, and expressive language skills to ensure richer descriptions of personal experience.

The third limitation is the restriction of the study to the public school system and one community based treatment program. There is evidence that victimization and perceiving the school as unsafe is more typical in public than Catholic schools (Anderman & Kimweli, 1997). Contact was initiated with three Catholic High Schools, unfortunately none of them were able to identify participants, and I was unable to gain access to other secondary schools in the separate system.

In spite of these potential pitfalls and limitations, I would assert that the text represents a valid portrayal of selected dimensions of the adolescent school experience. Verbal feedback from participants suggested an inviting context was created so participants could freely share their experiences of school, peers, and family. The extent to which the insights developed in the text can be generalized is subject to exploration by the community of researchers and individuals who work with troubled youth. The writing is presented as one interpretation of antisocial adolescent experience, and the text is only one of many possible that will be written as research on adolescent antisocial behavior continues.

Future Research Directions

New directions and possibilities for research emerged from this study. Further research into the phenomenon of male and female adolescent antisocial behavior would reveal how various socializing contexts interact with personal attributes to produce qualitatively different experiences. Is the adolescent-onset model appropriate for girls with less severe forms of conduct disorder or is the delayed-onset trajectory applicable to all antisocial females? To what extent do limited interpersonal skills of early adolescent males exhibiting later-onset antisocial behavior contribute to peer rejection and association with deviant peers? Increased understanding of adolescent gender differences will facilitate development of more accurate antisocial development models that in turn, will improve earlier detection and intervention with antisocial behavior problems.

Peer influence was an important agent identified by the participants of the current study, and participants indicated a clear connection between feelings of parental rejection and loyalty to a deviant peer group, especially for the females who manifested angry, defiant responses to authority figures. Yet, the literature downplayed the role of conflictual familial situations in the development of adolescent-onset antisocial behavior. Further exploration of the role of malfunctioning families in conjunction with the magnetic influence of antisocial peers could provide insight into the contrasting socialization processes inherent in family and peer contexts. The potential positive or damaging influence of more stable peers in the school setting may also be examined. Since the parental situation in the families of adolescent-onset teenagers tends to be more stable than the dysfunctional families of childhood-onset type, active family intervention early enough in the antisocial cycle may help disrupt the adolescent migration to troubled peers.

It would be helpful to investigate further the school structures that potentially contribute to the adolescent-onset antisocial pathway. All eight participants attended grade seven to nine junior high schools in the public system so it was not clear whether attendance in a kindergarten to grade nine school would have improved the transition to grade seven. What effect, if any, does the Catholic school system have on the development of antisocial behavior? Does a curriculum with a religious component impact behavior problems? Qualitative methodology exploring teachers' experiences of adolescent youth might highlight relevant ways of providing more effective ways of facilitating learning and personal growth in students and fostering improved coping strategies for teachers.

The Researcher's Experience

After spending the past two years accessing others' inside view, I thought it fitting to reflect on my experience of the phenomenological research process. The demanding method was at the same time frustrating, yet personally and professionally satisfying. The intimidating departure from a more predictable natural science methodology allowed for an emergent process hinging on discovery. The work was humbling and affirming as a tolerance for ambiguity developed and trust in the intuitive process swelled.

The privileged invitation into the personal lives of the participants' generated a more respectful understanding of adolescents' struggle to secure a positive, meaningful niche in life. I was heartened by the tremendous amount of hopeful optimism expressed by the teenagers who were struggling to find their way. My male perspective was further sensitized to challenges confronting female adolescents in the face of societal pressures of femininity pitted against a personal search of the true self.

Personally, the demands of this project were extremely challenging in other ways. The death of my spouse initiated a personal journey of relearning the world (Attig, 1991) as the research was abandoned for twelve months. In resuming the work, a connection was felt to participants' sense of lost time as I reflected on my own life. Buoyed by participants' optimism to bounce back from difficult circumstances, I appreciated more deeply the adolescents' daunting task of constructing a new life.

The role of researcher impacted my role as a therapist through affirming a therapeutic philosophy grounded in narrative therapy. The relentless pursuit to sustain an inquisitive approach fostered an attitude of disciplined curiosity (Clark, 1991) that carries into therapy when I pay more attention to clients' language and listen more of the time in different ways to peoples' stories. The questions I pose search more for reciprocal interactions, multiple contexts, personal narratives, and the essential truth of each person's perception to construct new possibilities.

The research highlighted a valuable lesson for my work as a clinician. During the research interviews, productive spaces opened for potentially life-changing language from adopting a consistently inquisitive stance. The curious inquiry mode of the qualitative research process paralleled a powerful component of therapy, laying open aspects of life for analyzing and reflecting about meaning. In qualitative research, as in therapy, a "not knowing attitude" requires that understandings, explanations, and interpretations not be limited by prior expectations or theoretically formed truths. Questions can then generate alternative views and encourage a focus on the meaning of new emerging possibilities. For antisocial adolescents escaping a destructive lifestyle, this process proved to be a supportive invitation in their search for the right path.

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APPENDIX A

School Counsellor Prompt

What to Say to Potential Research Participants

Thank you for your help in soliciting potential research participants for my research project. Because of confidentiality issues, I must rely on you to make the first contact with the student and the family and then I will contact the parent(s) to explain the project and obtain consent. Please use the term "*behavior problems*" when speaking to the student and/or family.

> *Greg Schoepp, a Ph.D. student in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Alberta, is very interested in learning more about adolescents who demonstrated behavior problems (such as stealing, lying, truancy, fighting, bullying) at school. He wishes to talk directly with teenagers to learn more about their experiences with peers, school, and family. Very few researchers talk with teenagers about their own perspectives and Greg wants to know more about the influences that affect adolescents and their behavior.*
>
> *Greg would need to meet with you two to three times. The first meeting would be to get acquainted, answer questions, and obtain written consent. The second meeting would be about an hour long interview that is tape recorded so the interview can be typed and analyzed. It may be possible to combine the first and second meeting into one. The third meeting would be to share the analyzed interview information and to get your feedback. Your identity and anyone else you talk about would be kept confidential and the tapes will be destroyed when the research is finished.*
>
> *The benefits to you would be the opportunity to share with others what it is like to be teenager. Greg is interviewing about eight teenagers, ages 15-19, from Edmonton area high schools and the results will written up in a thesis. It is hoped that your experiences will contribute to helping schools and families to become better at responding to the needs of teenagers.*
>
> *If you are interested in participating, Greg Schoepp would contact you and your parent(s)/guardian(s) to give you more information and to set up a time to meet. You may contact him at 940-7332 to find out more about the study.*

APPENDIX B

Invitation to Participants

Invitation to Volunteers

University of Alberta Research Project

- ARE YOU A TEENAGER BETWEEN THE AGES OF 15 TO 19 YEARS?
- HAS YOUR BEHAVIOR EVER BEEN A MAJOR AND ONGOING CONCERN FOR YOU AT SCHOOL?
- ARE YOU INTERESTED IN SHARING YOUR EXPERIENCES OF BEING A TEENAGER FOR PURPOSES OF RESEARCH?

This project involves an in-depth interview in the privacy of your own home, at school or another private setting of your choice.

Your involvement in the study would be strictly confidential and voluntary.

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN THE POSSIBILITY OF PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY GREG SCHOEPP WILL CONTACT YOU TO SET UP A TIME TO MEET

GREG SCHOEPP CAN BE REACHED AT 940-7332

APPENDIX C

Background Information

Interview Screening Questions for Parents and Potential Participant

1. This is a study about adolescents' experiences of their behavior problems at school and school. Does this fit for you now or in the past?
2. Describe what kinds of behavior problems you are now having or previously had at school.
3. The following is a list of more serious behavior problems. How many of these behaviors apply to you?
   (1) bullying, intimidating, or threatening others
   (2) initiating physical fights
   (3) using a weapon that can cause serious physical harm
   (4) physical cruelty to animals
   (5) physical cruelty to people
   (6) stealing while confronting a victim
   (7) forcing someone into sexual activity
   (8) deliberate fire setting with the intent of causing serious damage
   (9) deliberate destruction of others' property
   (10) breaking and entering
   (11) often lying to obtain goods or favours or to avoid obligations
   (12) stealing without confronting victims
   (13) often staying out late at night despite parental prohibitions beginning before age 13
   (14) running away from home overnight at least twice while living in parental home
   (15) often truant from school beginning before age 13.
   (16) did not exhibit antisocial behaviors prior to the age of 10.
4. Obtain family background-siblings, parental occupations, family composition
5. Obtain brief school history-schools attended, grade retentions, learning problems, special classes
6. Inquire about previous assessments, diagnoses, interventions undertaken
7. Inquire about any past and present psychiatric, medical, and health concerns
8. What interests you about this study?
9. The interview process is a personal one we will do together. Sharing your thoughts, feelings, and perhaps your disappointments - things that are personal, and maybe painful. How do you think that would be for you? I want to make sure that you feel comfortable sharing this with me.

APPENDIX D

Participant Consent

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION

I am aware that the purpose of this study is to better understand the lives of adolescents who demonstrate behavior problems at school. Through interviews, I will be asked to describe my experience of behavior problems in as much detail as possible. The study will be conducted as a Doctoral Dissertation by Greg Schoepp, under the supervision of Dr. Ronna Jevne, Professor, and Dr. John Mitchell, Professor, all from the Department of Educational Psychology, University of Alberta.

I agree to participate in the study and to be interviewed about my experiences of behavior problems. I understand that up to two interviews of about one to two hours will be tape recorded. I agree that my participation is completely voluntary, and realize that I may discontinue my involvement at any time. I am aware of the risk that in discussing my experiences, unpleasant feelings and memories may be aroused. If I raise concerns which I desire to discuss further with a counsellor, Greg Schoepp will suggest resource persons I might contact.

I am aware that all information is confidential and that my identity, along with the identity of anyone I mention, will not be revealed at any time. I understand that in any portion of the interview transcripts used in the final report, in articles or in tasks about the research, details will be changed so as to make my identification impossible. As well, the audiotapes and interview transcripts will be stored under lock and key in Greg Schoepp's home office. Audiotapes will be erased by him at the completion of the study. Transcripts will be disguised so as to protect the confidentiality of myself, family, and friends, and will be maintained as confidential files. If they are used for any additional analysis in future research, separate ethical approval by an Ethics Committee is required.

My parent(s) agree(s) to my participation in the research. They understand that their identity will be protected like mine. They also agree that no information will be shared with them unless I give written permission.

Any questions I have about the study at any time will be answered by Greg Schoepp (940-7332). I also understand that at my request, he will discuss the results of the study with me when it is completed.

On the basis of the above information, I, ______________________________________,
agree to participate in the above study.

SIGNED ____________________________ DATE ___________________________

ADDRESS ____

WITNESSED _________________________ DATE ___________________________

APPENDIX E

Parental Consent

PARENTAL CONSENT FOR DAUGHTER'S/SON'S PARTICIPATION

I am aware that the purpose of this study is to better understand the lives of adolescents who demonstrate behavior problems at school. Through interviews, my daughter/son will be asked to describe their experience of behavior problems in as much detail as possible. The study will be conducted as a Doctoral Dissertation by Greg Schoepp, under the supervision of Dr. Ronna Jevne, Professor, and Dr. John Mitchell, Professor, all from the Department of Educational Psychology, University of Alberta.

I agree to my son's/daughter's participation in the study and that they are to be interviewed about their experiences of behavior problems. I understand that up to two interviews of about one to two hours will be tape recorded. I agree that their participation is completely voluntary, and realize that they may discontinue their involvement at any time. I am aware of the risk that in discussing their experiences, unpleasant feelings and memories may be aroused. If concerns are raised for which my child or myself wish desire to discuss further with a counsellor, Greg Schoepp will suggest resource persons I might contact.

I am aware that all information is confidential and that my daughter's/son's identity, along with the identity of anyone they mention, will not be revealed at any time. I understand that in any portion of the interview transcripts used in the final report, in articles or in tasks about the research, details will be changed so as to make my daughter's/son's and family identification impossible. I agree and understand that the interview transcripts will not be available to me without permission from my daughter/son. The audiotapes and interview transcripts will be stored under lock and key in Greg Schoepp's home office. Audiotapes will be erased by him at the completion of the study. Transcripts will be disguised so as to protect my confidentiality, and will be maintained as confidential files. If they are used for any additional analysis in future research, separate ethical approval by an Ethics Committee is required.

Any questions I have about the study at any time will be answered by Greg Schoepp (940-7332).

On the basis of the above information, I ______________________________________,
agree to my daughter's/son's participation the study.

SIGNED ____________________________ DATE ___________________________

____________________________ DATE ___________________________

ADDRESS ____

WITNESSED ___________________________ DATE ___________________________

APPENDIX F

Interview Prompt

Invitation to Volunteers

University of Alberta Research Project

As a student who was or is having behavior problems, I want you to tell me about your experiences at school. I want you to describe your experience as it happened in your own words in whatever order it comes out. There is no right or wrong way of doing this. Just tell me your story as it happened. I am most interested in how things happened and how you felt at the time. I want you to concentrate on giving me a true account of your experience at school as you experienced it. I don't expect you to analyze your experiences or express opinions or information you might have gathered from movies, books, TV, or discussion with others. I just want the feelings, sensations, pictures, and thoughts that may have happened to you. I am not going to judge your experience but am interested in having you describe it as realistically as possible in whatever way is best for you.

Thank you for your participation in the study and your involvement in the study is confidential and voluntary.

GREG SCHOEPP CAN BE REACHED AT 940-7332

APPENDIX G

Interview Guide

Opening: I would like you to think back to the grade or the grades in school when you were having the most behavior problems or when you felt you were having the most problems. Think about that time and tell me what it was like for you at school during that time. Tell me about your feelings, your thoughts, your reactions. Tell me more about…, What was it like…, What do you mean…, What did it feel like…

1. School referents:
    - attitude toward school, teachers, administration
    - relationships with teachers, administration
    - antisocial behavior at school
    - attitude towards school discipline policies
    - academic strengths and limitations
    - enjoyable aspects of school
    - extracurricular activities

2. Peer referents:
    - peer affiliation
    - peer group composition
    - peer group activities
    - peer pressure
    - peer rejection

3. Family referents
    - relationship with parents
    - attitude towards family
    - relationships with siblings
    - parental discipline

Closing:
- Advice for other teenagers with serious behavior problems
- Advice for school counsellors, teachers
- Advice for parents
- Important life lessons learned from experiences
- Anything else you want to tell me about

APPENDIX H

Illustration of Transcript Analysis

Significant Statement-Andrea	Label	Themes
Just the thrill of being with them, like the thrill of what they did kind of thing. I never had that before and I was really caught up in it, just like some kind of movie or something. I just never thought that I'd get caught or I'd get in trouble or ruin my education or anything like that. I never really about it until it happened.	Thrill of being with friends Caught up in crime Never thought about consequences	Crime: Caught Up In It Personal Liabilities: I Was Always Like That
Just getting into trouble all the time and just never wanting anybody to tell what to do or anything. So I'd always get in more trouble because I'd never do any of my school work or do anything at home. I just wanted to be with my friends. If I said no, I don't want to skip school or anything, I'd like regret it later. But if I did, I'd regret that later too so I couldn't really make up my mind.	Disliked being told what to do Never did anything Dilemma: school or friends Uncertainty	Defiant Females: I Hate Being Told What To Do School Was Not a Priority: I Didn't Care Peer Persuasion
Then my mom married my step-dad and he just kind of took my place. It was them and then there was me so I kind of turned to my friends for support.	Replaced by step-father Felt alone Turned to friends	Rejection: Nothing Good at Home Belonging: I Felt Wanted
I was pretty depressed and I just realized I didn't want this. This isn't how I want to live my life. I needed to do something about it. I didn't want to sit and rot in jail.	Sadness Wanted a different life Decision to change	Turning Points: I Had to Hit Rock Bottom
I just don't let life waste anymore. I'm not going to drink my life away or just like hang out with my friends and just ruin my life like that. I want to get a good education, I want to be something when I like get older.	Not wasting time Won't ruin my life Future goals	Hope and Anticipation: Finding the Right Path
Not to take your life for granted. It's so easy to just waste it and think you're not wasting it because you're having too much fun, but you really are I guess. It's stupid when you stop and think about it, really think about it. Sometimes you have to learn the hard way. That's what I had to do.	Took time for granted Easy to waste time Thinking about past Learned hard way	Regrets: I Wish I Could Turn Back Time Hope and Anticipation: Finding the Right Path